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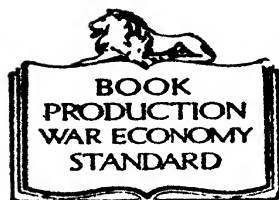
# GOD AND EVIL

by

C. E. M. JOAD

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participation in the reality of the universal consciousness, immortal. We are, then, immortal souls, and it follows that by virtue of our possession of, or rather, by virtue of our *being* immortal souls, we are here and now members of the real spiritual world, although by virtue of our bodies we are also and at the same time members of the familiar world of physical things.

If we live aright we can, even while we are in the body upon earth, partially realize our real nature as participators in the spiritual world and prepare ourselves to enter upon our full spiritual inheritance when our souls leave their bodies at death.

The universal consciousness which is the fundamental reality of the universe can be further defined, and by many, perhaps most, religions is further defined, as being of the nature of a Person. This Person is God.

Now we can only conceive of the personality of God in terms of our own personalities; we can, in other words, only conceive of Him anthropomorphically. To do so is no doubt to conceive Him falsely, since God is not after all a man, is not even a perfect man. Nevertheless, we are in a position to make certain statements about His attributes, as, for example, that He is all wise, all good, and all powerful; that He created us, created, that is to say, our souls, and that He cares for us and wishes us well; also that He created the familiar world of visible things and, therefore, our bodies which are members of that world. God, then, is the author of our being and it is to Him that we owe the gift of eternal life.

It is possible by practising certain disciplines, which are summed up in the words contemplation, meditation and prayer, and by living a good life to enter into direct intercourse with God. Such intercourse has been vouchsafed to the mystics who speak of it in the language of a revealed vision. The mystics are exceptional men; ordinary men can, however, communicate with God in prayer and, if they pray with faith and (what is important) pray for the right things, God will listen to their prayers and grant their requests.

Apart from the direct vision of the mystics, God has revealed Himself in indirect ways to man. There are certain values, the values, namely, of moral goodness, of truth and of beauty, which constitute the permanent objects of human aspiration and the goals of human effort. These values may be conceived as

attributes of God. They are, that is to say, the ways in which God reveals Himself to man. God has further vouchsafed to man the gift of freedom, so that, although he is free to live a good life, to pursue the values and to love God, he is also free to do the reverse of these things.

I do not claim that these propositions cover the whole ground of religious belief; they do not even constitute the highest common factor of the beliefs of all the great religions. The Buddhists, for example, do not believe in the immortality of the individual soul; the Hindus, that there was first a universal spirit or consciousness which created the world—before God, they claim, there was non-existence from which God Himself sprang—or the Zoroastrians that God is all-powerful—co-equal with God there is, they hold, another Being who is evil as God is good, who is God's antagonist and fights with Him for the control of the universe and the soul of man. I am conscious, too, that the circumstance of my having been born in a Western civilization and having inherited a Christian culture and tradition has permitted the beliefs maintained by the Christian religion to colour, many would say to bias, my statement of the propositions common to most religions. If I had been born in India or China, I should no doubt have stated them differently. Nevertheless they do, I think, constitute the essential part of what most people, who at different times in the history of mankind have 'believed in' religion, would be understood to mean when they said that they so believed.

### *The Religious Faculty.*

Secondly, there is a question of faculty. I have stated the above propositions as if their truth could be known in the same way as the truths of algebra; but religious truth is not exclusively a matter of intellectual knowledge, nor is the intellect the only faculty which is involved. What other faculties are involved, it is difficult to say. Most religions have, however, consistently maintained, and maintained as a part of the religion, as, that is to say, an article of faith, that mankind cannot live by knowledge alone. To know the truths which religions have affirmed is also to *feel* the truth of what one knows, so that it no longer remains something outside oneself, but is taken up into and incorporated

with one's whole being. The heart, in short, is involved no less than the brain. Hence 'experience' is perhaps a better word than 'knowledge', an experience which is of the whole man; whereas the intellect knows algebra, the heart human love, the emotions fear, it is the whole man, the whole man as thinking, as feeling, as striving and as loving, that knows or experiences the truth of religion.

### *The Ends of Religion.*

The question of faculty raises the question of ends. If there are truths which are beyond the realm of reason or of reason operating alone, it will follow that the knowledge of such truths will exhibit important differences from the kind of knowledge obtained by reason, or by reason operating alone. The characteristic feature of knowledge in the ordinary sense of the term, when we use it to describe the knowledge of the things of this world, is that the knower is separate from what is known. If I know that I hold a pen and sit at a desk, my knowledge does not make me one with the pen or the desk. Indeed, it would be said that I do indeed know them only because I am other than what I know. But the knowledge that is religious knowledge, just because it is more than knowledge, leaps across the gulf which separates knower from known, so that in the last resort, when the soul truly knows God, the soul ceases to be separate from God, ceases, that is to say, to be individual and becomes one with what it knows. This condition of oneness can be achieved while the soul is still in the flesh in the mystical vision, when the true self realises its oneness with the God it knows and loves; it may also be achieved, and permanently achieved, after death, since it is in part the body which separates the soul from God. 'Our spirit,' says St. Catherine of Genoa, 'is ever longing to be free from all bodily sensations so as to be able to unite itself to God through love.'

Even before this stage is reached, however, since the soul cannot know God however imperfectly without loving and revering what it knows, and since in the experience of earthly love the soul of the lover approaches and enters into communion with the soul of the beloved, we may say that the relation of the mind to religious truth is never purely intellectual and other, but is always and from the beginning in part intuitive and akin.

*Religious Practice.*

Thirdly, there is the question of practice. Since knowledge is not enough, since to know is also to love, to reverence and to strive after, the peculiar kind of knowledge which religion gives carries with it certain obligations, carries in particular the obligation to live in such a way as to commend oneself to Him whom one loves, to humble oneself before Him for whom one feels reverence, to draw nearer to Him after whom one strives. Religion, in other words, enjoins a way of life. It does so for three reasons. First, because such a way of life is seen in the light of revealed truth to be good in itself; secondly, because it is pleasing to God; thirdly, because it is a preparation of the soul for the fuller life to be lived hereafter.

The first and the second motives entail one another. It is good because it pleases God, and it pleases God because it is good. Yet each motive is separately authoritative. It is enough for one who recognizes the value of goodness that the way of life should be good in itself; it is enough for one who loves and fears God that it should be pleasing to Him. The third motive is particularly liable to perversion, since the suggestion that one should live in such and such a way in order to prepare oneself by so living for eternal bliss can be represented as an invitation to take out a long-term insurance policy whose benefits will be drawn in the next world; it can, in other words, be represented as an incentive to the exercise of far-sighted selfishness. In fact, however, this motive follows directly from the recognition of the necessary limitations of the life of the soul in the body, and a consequent determination to achieve a fuller and more blessed life hereafter.

From all these motives there follows the obligation to live in a certain way. That way has been pointed out to us by the teachers of the great religions. There are important differences in their teachings, but through them there run a number of threads which are fairly clear and fairly consistent: to be kind, gentle, compassionate and just; not to be self-seeking; to discipline, even in some cases to suppress the bodily passions; not to set over much store by the things of this world; to respect the rights of others, treating them as not less important than oneself; to love them so far as one can, and to love and fear God.

These and similar injunctions constitute common elements in the practical teaching of most of the great religions.

But the way of life which the religions enjoin cannot be lived without assistance. Though the spirit is willing, though, that is to say, the true self desires only what is good and to be good, the flesh is weak and the body, which is the source or the vehicle of all manner of evil desires, deflects the true self from its objectives, or so blinds it that it cannot perceive them. Hence arises temptation, which is a conflict between two motives, a good and a bad, often resulting in a yielding to the bad. Because men are by nature sinful, we cannot always resist temptation; we cannot, therefore, lead the life which the religions enjoin, unless God helps us to do so. If, however, we pray to Him for help it will be given. Thus it is only through the assistance of Divine Grace, as it is called, that man can succeed in living aright. 'I clearly recognize,' says St. Catherine of Genoa, 'that all good is in God alone, and that in me, without Divine Grace, there is nothing but deficiency.' 'The one sole thing in myself,' she continues, 'in which I glory, is that I see in myself nothing in which I can glory.'

I am not suggesting that the foregoing constitutes a definition of religion. It is obvious that it does not; but it does convey broadly what I understand by the content and the claims of religion. To an elucidation of this content and an examination of the claims that are made for it, the following pages are devoted.

## Chapter 1

# THE RELIGIOUS HYPOTHESIS: ITS TOPICAL RELEVANCE

### *Sketch of a Spiritual Odyssey.*

There is, we are told, a revival of interest in religious matters. People may not go to Church in large numbers, but, increasingly, they discuss the questions which are the Churches' concern and, since the war, there has been some increase in the number of those who go to Church. In this revival of interest I have shared.

I venture to introduce this personal reference in what is intended to be a non-personal book because it explains the book's existence. As a young man at Oxford, I participated, as was natural to my age and generation, in prolonged and frequent discussions of religion which, finding me a Christian, left me as they did many of my generation, an agnostic, an agnostic who entertained a deep-seated suspicion of all dogmatic creeds and, since after all I knew most about it and was in the full-tide of reaction against it,—a particular suspicion of the dogmatic doctrines of Christianity as preached by the Church of England.

As an agnostic, I felt convinced of two things: first, in regard to the matters which fall within the sphere of religion that we did not and probably could not know the truth; secondly, in regard to the so-called religious truths that I had been taught, as, for example, that God created the world as stated in Genesis at a certain point in time, and at another point in time sent His Son into it to redeem mankind, that it was improbable that they were true and certain that they could not be *known* to be true. In the confidence of this conviction I proceeded, to all intents and purposes, to turn my back upon the whole subject. As a teacher of philosophy, I naturally had occasion to concern myself with topics which bordered upon the sphere of theology,

but my treatment of such matters was purely conventional and my discourses conformed, I am afraid, to that rather pessimistic definition of a lecture as the transferring of a certain amount of miscellaneous information from the notebook of the lecturer to the notebooks of the students without passing through the minds of either.

In course of time I came to be known as a rationalist, and in this capacity was frequently in demand for lectures and articles which adopted an attitude hostile to revealed religion in general, and to the Christian Church in particular. It was in this rôle that I wrote a book entitled *The Present and Future of Religion*. It was, to put it mildly, critical of the religious view of the world and hostile to the organizations which make it their business to propagate it. I also engaged in a series of controversial letters with Arnold Lunn which were subsequently published in a book entitled *Is Christianity True?*, in which it was understood that I was to return a negative answer to the question. I enjoyed writing the book, which developed into a rough-and-tumble over the whole field of religious controversy and Christian apologetics, but I was never, I fear, a very good rationalist of the straighter sect. I never believed, for example, that matter was the only form of existence, that freewill was an illusion, or that the laws which determine the physical, determine also the workings of the mental and the spiritual worlds.

I mention these polemical writings because, in spite of their ostensible subject, they illustrate my contention that, like most of my kind and generation during the twenty years of the armistice, I gave little thought to religion. Certainly I engaged in controversies; admittedly I wrote a book on the subject, but the many words I wrote and said were not the expression of a mind engaged in thinking things out afresh, but of a mind which was living on the deposit of thought that it had laid down in the past. I was stirring and re-applying, but not adding to the old material. In fact I was like a *rentier* living on the income derived from the capital his ancestors had accumulated, for it is as his ancestor that the middle-aged man of forty is entitled to regard the young man of twenty who formed his mind.

Meanwhile, science, philosophy, politics, and, as time went on, increasingly politics, absorbed my attention. It was only

after the coming of the Nazis that my mind began again to turn in the direction of religion. As the years passed and the situation worsened, articles on religious topics over my name began to appear, paragraphs on religion crept into books devoted ostensibly to other matters, religious references and illustrations embellished discussions of economics, politics, and the future of society, until on the outbreak of war the subject leapt straight into the forefront of my consciousness where it has remained ever since.

I have ventured upon this brief sketch of a spiritual Odyssey because I take it to be not untypical. From conversations and discussions, especially with students, I surmise that the revival of interest in religion is widespread; that the subject has leaped into the forefront of their consciousness too. This topical relevance of religion derives from two sources.

## I. THE RELATION BETWEEN POLITICS AND RELIGION

Insisting that some ends are more valuable, some activities better than others, religion seeks among other things to answer the question, which are the things that are valuable in themselves, which the activities that are really worth while? To this question all the religions have given fairly full and definite answers. I am not concerned here to enquire whether these answers are true; it is enough that they should have been given and widely accepted. Acceptance lays upon those who accept a duty, the duty of pursuing those ends which are valuable and striving to engage in those activities which are worth while. Religion, in other words, requires of those who believe in it that they should live in a certain way, in that way, namely, which the code of ethics based upon the religion prescribes.

Now it is clear that the way in which we live is in some degree determined by the nature of the environment in which we are placed. It is, for example, easier to live a civilized life as a member of one kind of community than as a member of another; easier for a citizen of fifth century B.C. Athens than for a general under Genghiz Khan, or a guard in a Nazi concentration camp. Similarly, it is easier to live a religious life in some communities than in others. Excluding the extreme case of the saint and the



martyr some degree of freedom is, for most of us, a condition of the full development of the religious elements in our nature. Now many states have denied their citizens the satisfaction of this condition. Hence arise the questions, what kind of community will be most likely to provide the environment in which the religious life can be well and fully lived, and how will that community be governed? In this connection it has recently been borne in upon us that the religious life is incompatible with the all-embracing claims of the totalitarian State and can be lived freely and fully only in a democracy which permits its citizens to pursue the good as they see it.

Now it is obvious that even the best community that has ever existed does not provide an *ideal* environment for the religious life, and that there are all sorts of ways in which existing communities could from this point of view be improved. Proposals for the improvement of a community constitute what is known as a political programme.

In this way we can trace a chain of connecting links stretching from the truths of religion to the concrete programmes of political parties.

This connection between religion and politics subsists at all times, but in quiet times of peace it usually remains implicit. The peculiar circumstances of the last twenty-five years have, however, combined to thrust it into the foreground of men's consciousness.

### *Significance of Religion in Times of Political Change.*

This result came about in the following way:

Where there is a large measure of general agreement in regard to ultimate ends, political doctrines can be represented as means to their realization. Where, however, there are no common ends to which the generality of men subscribe, political programmes assume the status of ends in themselves. In the nineteenth century there was a general agreement among thinking people as to the nature and end of the individual. His nature was that of an immortal soul; his end was to achieve eternal salvation. Thus, when men differed about politics—even when they differed about ethics—their differences related to the best method of realizing the individual's nature and achieving the individual's

end. Moreover, there was, broadly speaking, a general agreement at least in the western democracies, as to the kind of society which it was desirable to establish. Owing to the decline of traditional religion these agreements no longer obtain, precisely because there is to-day no general acceptance of the view of the individual as an immortal soul and no general reliance upon the hope of eternal salvation. Consequently, political doctrines such as Fascism and Communism assume for the twentieth century the status which religious doctrines possessed in the nineteenth; they are not, that is to say, doctrines in regard to means to an agreed end, but doctrines in regard to ends about which there is no agreement. It is from this source that the intolerance which the protagonists of the different contemporary ideologies feel for one another derives.

The connection here indicated is a double one.

(a) If there is no agreement about ends, questions of ends will be widely discussed. Questions of ends include the following: What things are really valuable? What way of life ought to be followed? What is the status of the individual? What reasons can be given for serving and sacrificing oneself to the community, even against the dictates of one's conscience? These questions raise religious issues, for it is difficult to answer them without reference to the assumed meaning of life and destiny of man. Thus times of revolutionary political change are also times of religious questioning and discussion.

(b) When political and social creeds seek to arouse the emotions appropriate to religion and aspire to fill its rôle, the question inevitably arises, are they in the last resort likely to succeed? If we come to the conclusion that they are not, the reason for their failure must be sought primarily in the consideration that the religious view of the universe is in essence true. This means that there is another world which is in some sense the true home of the human spirit and that the spirit, aware, though dimly, of the fact, is capable of feeling specifically religious emotions only for objectives which possess an other-worldly significance. If ends pertaining solely to this world seek to appropriate these emotions to themselves, they will fail. It will further follow that the human spirit obscurely sensitive to the existence of the spiritual world, solicited, albeit unconsciously by the emotions which the presence

of virtue, and, if society denies it, to beg, borrow, sponge, steal, or murder until he gets it. In fact, let every adult with less than, say, £365 a year be painlessly but inexorably killed.

And the moral? That evil is due to bad social conditions. Now you can reform bad social conditions by Act of Parliament, substituting comfort, cleanliness, security, and financial competence for discomfort, dirt, insecurity, and want. Therefore, presumably, you can make men virtuous, or at any rate as nearly virtuous as makes no matter, by Act of Parliament.

There was a later explanation of evil in terms of early psychological maltreatment and consequent psychological maladjustment. In a spate of books published in the 'twenties psychologists and psycho-analysts revealed to us the hidden springs that worked our natures. And the sources of the springs lay, it seemed, outside our control. The Victorians had relied on self-control, postulating a faculty called the conscience. But now, it appeared that the part of us that we could control, the part over which conscience ruled, was not the part that mattered; that even conscience itself was only the sublimation of a feeling of guilt. If, then, we were not in the last resort responsible for the actions to which our passions inclined us, or for the restraints which our consciences exercised, what became of the notion of moral evil? Obviously, it went by the board. You could not, it was clear, blame people for the contents of the unconscious, if only because they did not know what the contents were. And if not for the contents of the unconscious, no more could you blame them for the influence of these contents upon consciousness, or for the distorted, perverted, or sublimated versions of them which appeared in consciousness. For the contents of the unconscious when manifested in consciousness were often changed out of all recognition, so that an incestuous desire for intercourse with one's mother might appear in consciousness as a resolution to break the ice for a winter bathe in the Serpentine.

Now the contents of the unconscious depended very largely upon one's early training. The first two years of one's life were extremely important, determining, according to Adler, the unconscious Life Goal which was to prescribe the motives and direct the course of all our subconscious activities; filling, according to Freud, our baby souls with all those desires which were later to

get us into trouble with society if we expressed, with ourselves, if we suppressed them. For to suppress the unconscious desires implanted in us in those first few years of life was to produce a disastrous effect upon the self; since the unconscious, like a fresh-flowing stream dammed at its source and turned back upon itself, overflowed into a noisome marsh, a 'complex' of evil humours, infecting the whole personality and seeping out into those neuroses which beneficent and well-paid psycho-analysts existed to remove. Now suppression was, we were assured, all too common. We were frustrated by foolish parents, perverted by nurses, suppressed by our own conscious selves in the interests of our overwhelming desire to put up a good show before the neighbours. From these perversions, frustrations and suppressions came the seeds of moral evil.

Once again the conclusion was the same. Remove the suppressions and you would exorcize evil. There is nothing *fundamentally* wrong with human nature; hence you had only to bring up a child rightly in a free environment, unfrustrated, unperverted, unsuppressed, neither over-loved nor over-thwarted, and it would grow up into a happy, free, fearless, and guiltless human being. Let it, in a word, fully and freely develop the latent forces and powers of its nature, and everything else would be added unto it; for—the implication was slipped in—the latent forces of its nature were such as were good. Hence, all that was required was that they should come to fruition and find full and free expression without perversion or restriction.

Evil, then, according to this view, was the result not of bad social, but of bad psychological conditions; not so much of an imperfect society, as of an imperfect family, an ill-directed nursery, and a wrongly run school. Reform society, said the Socialist, and evil will disappear. Reform the school and the family, the psycho-analysts added, and society will reform itself and, once again, evil will disappear.

Common to both these views was the assumption that evil consisted in the lack of something whose presence would be good. Thus fear and envy are evils because they indicate a lack of psychological adjustment; poverty, because it indicates a lack of material goods. Even war is evil, not because it is the result of evil intentions and desires, the intention to hurt and to destroy,

the desire to conquer and to humiliate, but because it wastes material and effort, because it misuses energy, because it is stupid, childish and irrational; because, in short, it is inefficient, and inefficiency indicates a failure in good sense. Men ought, it was intimated, by now to have outgrown war. Common also was the corollary that, since man was *by nature* both good and reasonable, increase of virtue could be induced by the action of ministers, teachers, spiritual pastors, parents, governesses, psycho-analysts and nurses, that the enlightened labours of these enlightened people would one day produce a perfect society, and that to the production of such a society considerations involving *other-worldly* factors were irrelevant. As Mr. Lewis Mumford puts it in his book *Faith for Living*, the conclusion was that man 'would presently abolish the evil inherent in life by popularizing anæsthetics and by extending the blessings of the machine and the ballot'.

*Diminished Plausibility of Contemporary Modes of Explaining Evil, and Explaining it Away.*

Recent events have, I submit, considerably diminished the plausibility of this view. The world to-day wears a different aspect from that in which I was brought up. I have referred to Shaw, the teacher of my generation. Let me refer to him again to show how his teaching has gone awry. In a famous scene in *Major Barbara*, Bill Walker, a tough from the slums, hits Jenny Hill, a Salvation Army lass, on the jaw and knocks her down. The rest of the scene is devoted to the taming, remorse and repentance of Bill Walker. Stimulated by Major Barbara, his conscience is represented as so working upon him that he is impelled to present himself to a heavyweight boxer Todger Fairmile (already converted) and to spit in his face, in order that he may suffer his own face to be smashed, smashed harder, as he is careful to point out, than he had smashed the face of Jenny Hill. Todger Fairmile fails to afford him satisfaction. Instead of smashing Bill Walker's face, he picks him up, puts him on the ground, kneels on him, and prays that he may be forgiven and converted. Walker is not in fact converted, but it is clearly intimated that he is changed, changed and humanized, so that he will never again hit a defenceless woman in the face.

In the spring of 1941 *Major Barbara* was shown as a film. It

was impossible to avoid the realization that, whether true or false as an account of the psychology of human beings in 1906, when it was written, the play was lamentably untrue of the psychology of human beings in 1941; and with that realization one sensed the gulf that separated 1906, when Walker's remorse was at least plausible, from 1941, when it is plausible no longer. To-day the Bill Walkers not only hit the Jenny Hills in the face, but proceed to smash the faces of the Major Barbaras who remonstrate with them. Their consciences do not reproach them. On the contrary, they glory in the hitting and the smashing, glory to the extent of proceeding from hitting to torturing, murdering and raping, to what is in effect the practice of a cult of violence which serves them to such purpose that its most successful devotees succeed in winning absolute power. Seeing *Major Barbara* in the spring of 1941, it was difficult not to feel that the doctrine of Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, the doctrine that successful violence, if it is violent enough and successful enough, *does* pay and may win for its practitioners all the powers and glories of the world, might after all be true. For, as Thrasymachus also taught us, successful violence can always clothe itself in the trappings of morality.

### *Theory and Practice of the Nazis.*

The Nazis have been quick to learn Thrasymachus's lesson. To call the Nazi movement immoral is misleading. So far from neglecting morality, it is fully alive to its advantages; so far from denying the ethical values which all Western societies have recognized during the last two thousand years, it appropriates them and then reverses them. Thus for the Nazis fraud is better than truth, violence than persuasion, ignorance than knowledge, hate than love, better precisely because and in so far as the reversed values are found to be more effective for promoting skill in the acquisition and ruthlessness in the exercise of power.

The realization of the contemporary unplausibility of the psychology of *Major Barbara* combined with the demonstration that violence sufficiently sustained and sufficiently successful could reverse the values of Christian morality and bid evil be its good, demanded a reconsideration of the whole way of

thinking which I had followed for twenty years, according to which evil was a by-product of circumstance. For me, reconsideration quickly led to rejection. Indeed, the rejection was implicit in the demand to reconsider. For could one any longer believe that all the horrors of cruelty which are being perpetrated in the contemporary world are the by-product of untoward circumstance; that every guard who has tortured and delighted to torture the helpless victims of the concentration camp is sadistic solely because his parents or his nurse over-repressed (or over-indulged) him in childhood; that every member of the mobs who have looted Jewish houses and humiliated Jewish people is suffused with emotions of ferocity and rage solely because his childhood was oppressed by poverty? With the realization of this improbability comes the question, was no rich man ever cruel, no unrepressed man ever tyrannical? With the posing of the question, there begins to file before the mind's eye that long line of absolute rulers, the sultans, the caliphs, the emperors and the kings, with the smaller fry, the schoolmasters and the workhouse superintendents and the slave overseers, the Squeerses and Brocklehursts and Bumbles and Murdstones, bringing up the rear of the melancholy procession, who had money enough to be exempt from the cramping effects of poverty, and power enough to be free from the repressive effects of authority, and who yet used their power to increase, and often deliberately to increase, the misery of human beings with such consistency as to provoke Lord Acton's terrible verdict, 'All power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. All great men are bad.'

*That the Contemporary View of Evil is Untenable.*

The answer to these questions is, it would seem, all too obvious. Evil is not *merely* a by-product of unfavourable circumstances; it is too widespread and too deep-seated to admit of any such explanation; so widespread, so deep-seated that one can only conclude that what the religions have always taught is true, and that evil is endemic in the heart of man.

I am claiming no credit for this conclusion. On the contrary, it is ground for humiliation to have come to it so late. There has always been evil in the world, and it is only poverty of

imagination which refuses to accept its significance until it struts prominent and repulsive upon the stage of one's times. The events which have burst into the lives of middle-class English people during the last quarter of a century are not novelties. Objectively regarded, they are in the nature of a return to normal; it was the peace, the security, the decency, the gentleness of life that were new. But until they *did* burst upon us, the quiet security of our lives enabled us to take so superficial a view of the evil that, seen through our ivory telescopes, seemed a remote and a diminishing thing, that we slipped into the intellectual blunder<sup>1</sup> of supposing it a mere by-product of environment and circumstance, which could be eradicated by changing the environment and removing the circumstance, the blunder, in short, of denying what we had traditionally been taught, the doctrine of original sin. Our mistake is obvious enough now, so obvious that we are left wondering how we could ever have made it. However, let it be said in extenuation, there are precedents enough.

Periods of political instability in which human nature has enjoyed more than its usual opportunities of demonstrating the stuff of which it is made, have always provoked a more than usually abundant flood of religious interest and speculation, if only because men have been led to wonder with a new urgency how a world such as they see about them could have been planned by a God who is both well meaning and all powerful.

### *Socrates, Plato and Pascal.*

Take, for example, the case of Socrates, questioning, arguing and speculating at the end of the Peloponnesian war, and of Plato writing during the troubled period which succeeded it. In opposition to the prevalent trend of speculative interest which had hitherto lain in the domain of the physical sciences, both men are concerned with the moral government of the universe and, more particularly, with the nature and duty of man. What is more, this concern is directly traceable to the troubled times in which they lived; it was *because* men lusted for money and power that Socrates sought to show that true wisdom consisted in the pursuit of neither; it was *because* the

<sup>1</sup> The reasons for supposing it is a blunder will be given in Chapter 3.



## Chapter 2

# THE ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE CREATION OF THE WORLD BY AN OMNIPOTENT, BENEVOLENT BEING

To 'examine the evidence available for an answer' entails, in the first place, for me a re-examination of the evidence which has in the past seemed to dictate a negative answer. I propose, then, in this chapter and the next to try to re-state the arguments which for many years seemed to me to tell decisively against the religious view of the universe, in that they convinced me not so much that it was untrue, as that it could not be known to be true, and was in the highest degree unlikely. I want to see how far these arguments still carry conviction. It may be that answers will now appear to arguments which formerly seemed unanswerable, or it may be that, although the arguments remain unanswered, other considerations will be found to have thrust themselves into the foreground which have the effect either of by-passing the arguments, or of robbing them of part at least of their significance. This, indeed, is, I suspect, what has happened. These fresh considerations, considerations of a positive order, will be set out in the later chapters of the book.

### *The Role of Argument in the Discussion of Religion.*

Before I embark upon a statement of the arguments to which I have referred, a word is necessary as to the place and relevance of argument in a discussion of this kind. For those who are already convinced that there is God, that He is good, that He created the world, that the soul of man is immortal, and that our purpose in this life is to prepare ourselves for eternal life by pleasing the God who loves us—for those, I say, who are convinced of the

truth of these and similar propositions, argument is unnecessary. When one *knows*, there is no need to reason. I am also aware that there is a mode of conviction which is independent of argument; it may even be the case that there are whole spheres of thought in which the way of argument is a comparatively unimportant road to conviction, and that religion is one of them. That this is, indeed, the case is frequently urged by writers on religion. Take, for example, the following statement by the late Sir James Baillie, Vice Chancellor of Leeds University:

‘From the point of view of spiritual religion, it is wiser to have Faith in God than to find reasons for God’s existence: it is fitter to Hope in God than to seek to demonstrate immortality; it is better to Love God than to try to understand Him, if indeed Love be not the best kind of understanding . . . To awaken these forms of communion, to express, and to support them is the primary object of religious institutions, whether it be through creed and ordinance, or prayer and praise, or ceremonies and sacraments.’

As Blake puts it, ‘the eye sees more than the heart knows’.

Whether Blake and Sir James Baillie mean the same I would not venture positively to assert, but most people would, I think, agree that religious truth is never *just* a matter of reasoning, and that the heart has its reasons of which the head knows nothing.

It may well be, then—let the possibility be admitted—that there are truths which, undiscoverable by reason, are revealed to the eye of faith. But the eye of faith must be open to see them, and in the case of one who is pondering the question, ‘Are the conclusions of religion such as he can accept?’, *ex hypothesi* it is not open. If it were, the question would not arise. In such a case, and for such a one argument, I submit, is the essence of the matter. Is the religious hypothesis, he wants to know, one that commends itself to his reason? If he finds that it is, he may be prepared to take the consequences which follow from his reason’s acceptance, recognizing the obligation to live in a certain way, to try to love his fellow men, and to seek to find a way of approach to his Creator in prayer. But without the sense of immediate conviction which direct experience alone can give, some degree of intellectual acceptance must come first. The reason, then, must be convinced.

*The Truths of Religion Not Self-Evident.*

Now some truths are self-evident to the reason, as, for example, that the whole is greater than the part, and these it will accept without argument. But in the case of those truths which do not fall within this class, it is by argument and by evidence that the reason must be convinced. Now the fundamental truths of religion do not seem to fall into the self-evident class; if they did, there would not be so much disagreement as to what they are, or so much doubt as to whether they are true.

A work has recently been published entitled *The Bible of the World*, which consists of lengthy extracts from the writings which contain the fundamental teaching of all the world's great religions. Here in a compendious form is a statement of what the great religious teachers have maintained. It is surprising to discover the extent to which they do *not* agree.<sup>1</sup> I had been led to suppose that the basic affirmations of the religions were the same. That this world is not the only world; that the spirit is both more real and more important than matter which is its creature; that the world of space, time and matter is in some sense illusory; that man's true destiny is to be found elsewhere; that God created the world and is good—these and similar affirmations were, I had believed, common to all the great religions.

But the World's Bible makes this belief extremely difficult to sustain. How various, for example, are the teachings of the religions in regard to the beginnings of the world! I had supposed that in the beginning there was God and that God created the world. But the Hymns of the Rig Veda (Hindu) begin with a lengthy and obscure discussion as to whether non-existence or existence came first, a discussion which solves the difficulty, rather cavalierly, as I cannot help thinking, by the announcement that *first* there was neither non-existence nor existence. The first event that occurred was the event of desiring, but this was not the desiring of any person, nor, apparently, was it a desiring for anything. Taoism, on the other hand, is of the opinion that non-existence was first.

<sup>1</sup> For a statement of the assertions upon which the mystics agree, see Chapter 7, pp. 252, 253.

'The portal of God is non-existence. All things sprang from non-existence. Existence would not make existence existence. It must have proceeded from non-existence and non-existence and nothing are one. Herein'

—this passage from the works of Chuang Tze rather surprisingly concludes:—

'is the abiding place of the sage.'

Suppose, however, that we decide to begin with existence; it would be natural to suppose that this existence was the existence of a person, was, in fact, God. But Buddhism denies this. 'It denies,' that is to say, to quote from the notes which the Editors have appended to *The Bible of the World*, 'or evades the conclusions of Hinduism concerning an intangible supreme Being with its *côterie* of personified powers in the form of Gods.'

But even if the existence of God be premised, it is not apparently to be taken for granted that He is good; or rather, if there is a good God, there is also, many hold, an evil one. This is the teaching of Zoroastrianism, which postulates the presence in the universe from the first of an evil antagonist to the omniscient and apparently omnipotent God of the other religions, an antagonist who becomes prominent in the later books of the Old Testament. Or take the immortality of the soul, which one would have thought to be inseparably bound up with a religious attitude to the universe. Buddhism denies it and denies it partly because it denies the reality of individuality, the ego being for Buddhism, in the words of the Editor, only 'a degrading composite of temporary obstructive delusions'.

Other examples of radical disagreement in regard to fundamentals could be cited. They are numerous enough to suggest that the fundamental truths of religion are not, to say the least, self-evident.

### *The Need for but Lack of Reasons.*

This being the case, one would expect, and one would feel entitled to expect, a certain amount of argument in religious writings. Some conclusions one accepts without argument. 'Truth,' says Blake somewhere, 'can never be told so as to be understood and not believed,' by which I take him to mean that,

if you understand clearly what is the case, then you must believe that it is the case. Now in regard to some truths this is certainly so. 'Is that a cow, mother?' 'Yes, my dear.' 'Why?' There is no answer to the question. If the conclusion is not accepted without argument—and in the cow case we hope that it will be—no argument can be advanced to induce its acceptance.

But the conclusions of religion do not, as we have seen, fall into this self-evident category. In regard to *them*, the question 'Why?' is in the highest degree pertinent. Reasons in fact can be legitimately asked for in support of that which is far from being universally accepted. Yet, by and large, no reasons are given. Religious writers are content to announce, to announce and to rhapsodize and exhort on the basis of what they have announced. It is this high and mighty 'Thus saith the Lord' attitude to meaningless or dubious propositions, which constitutes to many modern minds one of the greatest obstacles to the acceptance of the religious hypothesis. For many of us it is a hypothesis and we must, therefore, be given reasons for adopting it. Instead, we receive announcements which are only significant provided that it be already adopted.

Even if we agree with Blake that it is only necessary to understand in order to believe, we must still add that a little argument would assist understanding. Since I have provisionally cast myself for the rôle not of a believer, but of an enquirer, I cannot at this stage of my enquiry take account of considerations which only assume importance when the fundamental questions from which the enquiry proceeds have been answered, and answered in a certain way; when, in other words, the fundamental premises of religion have been accepted. Until that point has been reached, the method of procedure must be the method of argument.

What, then, are the arguments which for me have told so strongly against the religious view of the universe, that for thirty years or more I have taken it for granted that, in the form in which it had been presented to me, it was untenable?

## I. THE DIFFICULTY OF PAIN AND EVIL

First, there was the difficulty presented by the facts of pain and evil. These, it is obvious, exist; it is obvious, that is to say, to

me that I suffer pain and that people do me evil. Now either this pain and this evil in which I believe are real, or they are unreal.

*A. The Hypothesis that Pain and Evil are Real.*

Let us suppose first that they are real. Then, assuming that this world is the creation of an omnipotent and benevolent God, either (1) He created them, or (2) He did not.

(1) *That God Created Them.* Let us suppose that He created them. Then, assuming that before the world was created there was only God, assuming, therefore, that initially there existed only what was good, He deliberately introduced pain and evil into a perfect universe, when He need not have done so. Such action certainly does not betoken a good God; indeed, if a human being were to do such a thing, we should regard him as the greatest criminal who had ever existed. If, therefore, God, being omnipotent, deliberately created pain and evil, He cannot be benevolent. Now it is unpleasant to think that the creation of life on this planet is the handiwork of a *malignant* deity; scarcely less so, to regard it as the work of a humorist who staged us on the boards of the universe for the pleasure of watching the farce from the wings. The joke, if joke it is, is in the worst possible taste. Sooner than this, one would prefer that the universe was an accident, or was exclusively composed of matter.

(2) *That God did not Create Them.* Let us suppose that God did not create pain and evil; then either (a) they exist in His despite, or (b) He permits them to exist for some purpose of His own when He could, if He wanted to, eliminate them.

(a) If God did not create pain and evil and they exist in his despite, we can only conclude that He would remove them, if He could, but cannot. In this case He may be benevolent, but He is not omnipotent. This seem a plausible view; at least two religions, Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, have in different forms maintained it. Zoroastrianism conceives of the universe as a field of struggle between two spirits, a good and a bad. Their conflict sways this way and that, and first one and then the other gains the advantage, but neither can attain a complete and permanent victory. The universe, then, is a fundamental dualism. God has His co-equal antagonist and there is no assurance that good will triumph.

This, I repeat, is a plausible view and there is much in our day to day experience of life which bears it out, but it is assuredly not the view officially sponsored by religion, as we understand it in the West. Official Christianity has in fact persecuted Manichaeism as heresy.

(b) If God could remove pain and evil, but permits them to exist for some purpose of His own, the question arises, what can that purpose be? This raises the general question of God's motive in creating the world which will be discussed in Section II of this chapter.

*That They are the By-Products of Man's Enjoyment of Free Will.*

The commonest form of this hypothesis is the Christian. Briefly it runs as follows. Pain and evil were not created by God. How, indeed, could He have created them, since He is all good? They are, therefore, the offspring of man. Man as originally created was good, but he was also endowed with the gift of free will. God gave him this gift out of His infinite goodness in order that, through its exercise, man might become a fully moral being. Morality involves the knowledge of good and evil; it also involves the ability to choose the good and to eschew the evil. A being who, knowing both good and evil and tempted by evil, yet habitually resists the temptation and cleaves to what is good is a higher moral being, is, indeed, a higher being in every way than one who is ignorant of the distinction between good and evil—for such a one is a mere animal, if he is unaware of the distinction; an automaton, if, though aware of it, he is so constituted that he *can* only choose the good. The degree of virtue which may be achieved by a freely choosing, freely willing being is, therefore, higher than that which belongs either to an unknowing animal or to a non-willing automaton, even if the latter is automatically determined by his nature to do what is good and only what is good. This higher degree of virtue God out of his infinite goodness has placed within the reach of man by giving him free will.

Now the exercise of free will, if it is to be morally fruitful, implies that good can be chosen when it need not be chosen, implies therefore, that man is free not to choose as well as to choose the good; free, therefore, to choose the evil. But if evil is to be chosen, it must exist and possess the power of exercising

attraction upon its possible chooser. The potential existence of evil is, then, a condition of the fruitful exercise of the gift of free will and the formation of moral character as a result of that exercise. This potential existence of evil becomes actual, if man misuses his gift by choosing wrongly. Such, in brief, is the Christian answer. How far is it satisfactory?

*Difficulties in the Christian Account of Evil as Due to Man's Misuse of God's Gift of Free Will.*

It seems to me to be open to the following objections:

(i) *The Evolutionary Difficulty.* The evidence in favour of the doctrine of evolution seems to me to be overwhelming. In its main outlines Darwin's account of the gradually evolving species which have succeeded one another upon the earth must be accepted as true. Man we know to have been a comparatively late comer. Man has been upon the earth for about a million years; but before man there had been life of some kind during a vast period which has been estimated at anything from 600 million to 1200 million years. Throughout this immense period we must suppose that there was pain. Mesozoic monsters fought and killed; big brutes preyed upon little ones; creatures tore one another to pieces, died lingering deaths, were starved. . . . Millions of birds die of starvation every year, and doubtless did so before man appeared. Indeed, the natural world is and always has been shot through with pain. Take, for example, the behaviour of the Ichneumonidae. These are wasps which sting their caterpillar prey in such a way as to paralyse their movements without killing. They next lay eggs in the body of the living, but paralysed caterpillar whose warmth in due course hatches out the young larvae. These immediately begin to feed upon their environment—that is to say, on the paralysed body of the caterpillar. Thus the forethought of the parents provides the larvae with an abundant supply of living meat; an ingenious arrangement to turn one's incubator into one's dinner, but it is difficult not to believe that from the caterpillar's point of view it would have been better, had things been arranged differently. Or consider the habits of the midge *Miasor* which signalizes its appearance in the world by first eating its way out of the body of its mother and then eating its way out of the body of its grandmother,



as a preliminary to giving birth on its own account and being gnawed through in its turn by its own offspring.

Now it seems to me impossible to ascribe the pain which the habits of the animal and insect world entailed during this vast period to the misuse of the gift of free will enjoyed by man, since man did not then exist. If we say that the workings of nature were designed, we must ask, what sort of design can it have been which planned the behaviour of the Ichneumonidae?

(ii) The argument which I have outlined implies that the highest degree of moral virtue is achievable only by those who have known evil, have felt the temptation to do it, and have overcome the temptation, habitually choosing the better when they might have chosen the worse course. If the argument from free will does not entail this view of moral worth, it falls to the ground. Now we cannot suppose that God, if He is all good, feels the temptation to do evil. Free will He may, nay He must have; but we cannot suppose Him to be engaged in continual moral conflict as a result of which He is continually increasing in moral worth. Therefore, that which the argument requires us to regard as the highest degree of moral worth—that for the sake of attaining and increasing which the whole apparatus of pain and evil has been introduced into the universe—is unattainable by God. Yet God, we are also asked to regard as perfect.

(iii) Either God knew what the result of endowing man with free will would be or He did not. If we are to suppose Him omniscient, He must have known; He must, then, have known that man would misuse the gift of free will to do evil and to inflict suffering. Now before the creation of this world there was only God. The universe, then, before the creation of this world, since it consisted only of God, was wholly good. Therefore God created man knowing that the result of his action would be to introduce pain and evil into a world that knew them not.

He did not, that is to say, according to this view of the matter, *deliberately* create pain and evil, but He wittingly connived at their introduction by man's agency into a painless and evil-less world. God, then, is not absolved from responsibility and the conclusion reached in A (1) applies.

If we say that God did not know what use man would make of his free will, and did not know precisely because the future is

wholly undetermined, man being free to make it as he pleases, then three corollaries follow. First, God is not omniscient. I do not know that this is an objection, except in so far as the religions of the world have asserted God's omniscience with an emphasis only less than that which they have placed upon His benevolence and His omnipotence. Secondly, it is implied that the events which will take place in the future are unknown because unknowable. God does not, therefore, know what the end of man's moral pilgrimage will be. It may be that it will turn out badly, leading to such an increase of evil in the world that good is to all intents and purposes blotted out. My point is not that this will happen, but that it *may* happen, and that God, if the future is wholly undetermined, cannot know that it will not. Nevertheless, God took the risk of this happening, knowing that it was a risk, knowing in other words, that with the exception of Himself, the universe might become wholly evil. One cannot conceive why He should take such a risk.

Thirdly, there is no predestined goal for the universe or destiny for man. The universe is, therefore, in this sense purposeless, since it is not purposed to any end. It seems difficult to reconcile this conclusion with the conception of design.

(iv) If, alarmed by this conclusion, one insists on the fact of design and of God's omniscience in relation to his design, it becomes extremely difficult to see how the concept of man's freedom can be sustained. For if God is omniscient, He must know everything that is going to happen. God cannot make a mistake; therefore what He knows to be going to happen must happen in accordance with His knowledge of it. Therefore it cannot happen otherwise; therefore it is determined; therefore man's conviction that he is free to make the future as he pleases must be illusory.

(v) In the exercise of his free will man, we are told, chooses evil and rejects good. Why does he? Only, presumably, because he is himself either an evil or an ignorant, that is to say, a partially evil, being, since it is only a being who is at least partially evil who could choose evil when he might have chosen good. Now the evil of character involved in the bad choosing must precede the evil which is chosen or which results from the choice. Man, in other words, does not become evil because he chooses evil; he chooses evil because he is already evil prior to the choosing

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wholly undetermined, man being free to make it as he pleases, then three corollaries follow. First, God is not omniscient. I do not know that this is an objection, except in so far as the religions of the world have asserted God's omniscience with an emphasis only less than that which they have placed upon His benevolence and His omnipotence. Secondly, it is implied that the events which will take place in the future are unknown because unknowable. God does not, therefore, know what the end of man's moral pilgrimage will be. It may be that it will turn out badly, leading to such an increase of evil in the world that good is to all intents and purposes blotted out. My point is not that this will happen, but that it *may* happen, and that God, if the future is wholly undetermined, cannot know that it will not. Nevertheless, God took the risk of this happening, knowing that it was a risk, knowing in other words, that with the exception of Himself, the universe might become wholly evil. One cannot conceive why He should take such a risk.

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of evil, because he is evil, that is to say, to begin with. We are forced, then, to the conclusion that the choosings of a particular human being proceed from his nature and are what they are because his nature is what it is. If they are sometimes bad it is because his nature is partially evil. How, then, does he come to have a partially evil nature? Presumably, because of bad heredity, or bad training, or bad environment, or because of all of these. But who bestowed upon him his heredity? His parents, grandparents and ancestors. Who gave him his training? His parents, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters. Who made his environment? The generation that was adult when he was a child.

Now precisely the same question can be asked in regard to all of these. Why did the parents, grandparents and ancestors make the bad choices in virtue of which they bequeathed the bad heredity? Why did the teachers make the bad choices in virtue of which they gave the bad training? Why did the immediately preceding adult generation make the bad choices in virtue of which they formed the bad environment? These questions can, it is obvious, be pushed back until they bring us face to face with those first generations or that first generation of men who so conducted themselves as to initiate the evil ancestry and establish the first evil environment. The evil propensities in virtue of which they so acted cannot in *their* case have been due to ancestry or environment, since if they had been, the generation or generations which we are supposing to have been the first would not have been the first. Therefore, the first generation or generations already contained within themselves the seeds of evil tendencies. By whom implanted? The only possible answer seems to be by their Creator. God, therefore, created man initially with the potentiality to do evil, with, in fact, evil tendencies. The questions then arise, first, why did He wish to create such a being, seeing that He Himself is wholly good? Secondly, how *could* He have created such a being, if He were Himself wholly good? The point of the first question lies in the consideration that it is not the mark of a wholly good being gratuitously to introduce the seeds of evil into the world by creating a potentially evil one; of the second, that it may be doubted whether even God, to whom all things are in theory possible, could have generated out of His own being that which His own being does not contain and could

not contain even in embryo. God, being all good, does not contain even the potentiality of evil; how, then, it may be asked, could He create from Himself a being possessing a potentiality which was not in Himself?

These difficulties arise on the assumption that man is partially evil. I do not know what to make of the assertions of saints and mystics to the effect that man is *wholly* evil, or, alternatively, that *all* that there is in man that is good is due to the infusion of divine grace. 'I clearly recognize how that all good is in God alone,' said Saint Catherine of Genoa, 'and that in me, without divine grace, there is nothing but deficiency.' 'I would not that to my separate self', she goes on, 'even one single meritorious act should ever be attributed.'

It is possible, indeed it is probable, that statements of this kind are not to be taken at their face value, but are to be understood in some esoteric sense. In so far, however, as we can attribute to the words of which they are composed the meaning which they would ordinarily be supposed to bear, they enormously strengthen the force of the foregoing difficulties by suggesting that human nature in itself, without, that is to say, 'divine grace', is wholly sinful. Whence, one wonders, did man derive this wholly sinful nature? 'If I do anything that is evil, I do it myself alone,' said Saint Catherine, 'nor can I attribute the blame to the Devil or to any other creature, but only to my own self-will, sensuality and other such malignant movements. And if all the angels were to declare that there was any good in me, I would refuse to believe them.' Yet Saint Catherine was created by God who gave her her nature and made it such as it was. Again the difficulty arises to which attention has already been drawn, but arises with renewed force: *why* should God have wished to give man such a nature, and *how* could He have given him such a nature?

(vi) We are asked to believe that his ability to do evil is a necessary condition of man's possession of free will, since if man really is free, he must be free to do evil. That the degree of moral worth achieved by a free being is higher than the degree of moral worth possible to an automaton is, I think, self-evident. It follows, therefore, that the possibility of doing evil is a necessary condition of the achievement of higher moral worth; it follows,

think, is the line which most religious people would now be disposed to take, and it seems to me at the moment to be the most promising. Nevertheless, I cannot avoid the view that the arguments advanced above (A (2), (b) (i) to (vi)) are very hard to meet. I do not, for example, see what account is to be given of the pain endured by animals before man appeared. It is, indeed, difficult to understand why, if God was free to do as He liked, He did not arrange matters differently. I shall have more to say under this head when I come to consider the question of evil in more detail in the next chapter.<sup>1</sup>

A third answer draws attention to the absurdity of supposing that man with his limited understanding should expect to understand these matters and denounces the impertinence of his venturing to criticize God's arrangements. Who are we, it asks, that we should enquire why God did not arrange things differently? Who are we that we should try to comprehend the ways of God's omnipotence? God's ways are mysterious and the faithful will be content to leave the mystery unresolved, knowing that God acts for the best.

As the Abbé Jerome Coignard puts it in Anatole France's book *At the Sign of the Reine Pedauque*:

'Such is not the case, my son, with divine laws. These latter are imprescriptible, ineluctable, and stable. Their absurdity is but apparent, and hides a wisdom we cannot grasp. If they offend our reason, it is because they are superior to it and because they accord with the true ends of man and not with the ends which are apparent to him.'

Saint Augustine has stated with admirable succinctness the conclusion of some of the arguments which I have outlined; Either, he said, 'God cannot abolish evil or He will not; if he cannot, He is not omnipotent; if He will not, He is not benevolent.' Quite so, yet Saint Augustine was a great Christian who maintained that there were some things beyond man's understanding, and that the problem of pain and evil was one of them. I find this answer difficult to accept for two reasons. First, if the arguments stated above are sound, the proposition that pain and evil exist and that God is both omnipotent and benevolent are not so much beyond reason as against it. It is not so much

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter III, pp. 70-74.

a case of saying that we do not understand; the difficulty is greater than that. It is a case rather of something that we *cannot* understand because it is not understandable. Now that there may be mystery at the heart of things we may fairly conceive, but the mystery should not be such as to outrage our reason. The world, in other words, should not be an irrational one. 'I do not know how the world came to be as it is. Its origin and design are, for me, shrouded in mystery.' This is a reasonable conclusion. 'I do not know how the world came to be as it is, but what I believe is something that my reason cannot possibly accept. Therefore I am going to say that what my reason cannot accept, but what I nevertheless believe, is a mystery' is an unreasonable conclusion.

Secondly, if it is to be said that human reason is impotent in these spheres, then let us accept the logic of the assertion and cease to reason. Those who believe in religion do not, however, cease to reason. The religious hypothesis, they assert, is reasonable; indeed, it is by far the most reasonable explanation of the universe that we can conceive. And they proceed to support this view by following a course of study, the study of theology, which consists of a training in close and detailed reasoning of the most rigorous order. Reason, then, is admitted to be legitimate in this sphere; its workings are emphatically not disavowed. With what logic, then, are we bidden to accept its competence at one moment and to deny it at the next?

To the difficulties outlined above I have presented to the best of my ability such answers as I am acquainted with. Admittedly they are lame, yet I do not know how to improve on them. Hence, if it were not for the positive considerations to be mentioned in later chapters I should regard the pain and evil difficulty as being finally destructive of the religious hypothesis.

## II. THE DIFFICULTY OF MOTIVE

### *That God Cannot Change.*

A difficulty scarcely less formidable seemed to me to be presented by the question of motive. Reading Plato's *Republic*, I had been greatly impressed by Socrates' demonstration that God



cannot change. Change, Socrates points out, is either voluntary or involuntary. Now a change in God cannot be involuntary, since there is nothing other than God which could produce changes in Him against His will. If there is no external agency to set up change in God, He must change, if He does so, of His own accord. Now voluntary change implies a sense of dissatisfaction in the sense that a being who voluntarily changes is dissatisfied with his existing condition which he accordingly seeks to alter. Yet how, Socrates asks, could God being perfect feel dissatisfied? How, again, assuming that to begin with there is perfection and only perfection, can it be supposed that any good could be added through and as a result of change to that which is already perfect? A perfect being cannot, indeed, add anything whatever to his perfection; thus the bloom does not add perfection to a perfect rose, since a rose without bloom is less perfect than a rose with its bloom upon it, is, therefore, an imperfect rose. To put the point in another way, change implies lack or need, need for that which it is hoped to achieve by changing. The being who voluntarily changes must be conceived, then, to desire something, that, namely, which is expected to accrue as a result of the change. Now desire is either for what is good or for what is bad. If God is good, He cannot desire what is bad. Therefore, He must desire what is good. Therefore, there must be some good other than that which is already possessed by God which He desires and conceives that He may achieve by changing. But if there is some good which God lacks, He cannot be wholly good to begin with. For all these reasons it has seemed to me impossible that God should change.

*That God Could not have Created.*

Now the act of creating the world implies change, change, that is to say, in the Creator. Creation is the deliberate bringing into being of something that did not previously exist or the making actual of what existed only potentially or in embryo. Prior to creation there was, we must assume, only God. After it, there was God plus the world, the world being generated as a result of the change which God deliberately willed. Moreover, the change involved in creation was not only in the world, but was also in God, for God having created the world, having, that

is to say, fulfilled His desire and satisfied his need, must have been in a different state from God before the creation, while He was still in a state of desiring and needing.

There are many variations on this theme of the inconceivability of an act of creation by a perfect God. For example, if God is infinite, He embraces everything. Therefore, He embraces all possible conceptions. Therefore, He cannot conceive 'a new conception. Either, then, the world was not created and was not, therefore, new, since it had been conceived by God since the beginning of time and time also was conceived by God, or God did not conceive it and God is not, therefore, infinite.

Again, God, being infinite, is beyond time and space; time and space are conditions necessary to any act of construction or creation. Therefore the conditions necessary to construction or creation, being limiting conditions, are not satisfied in the case of God who is unlimited. Therefore, the conditions necessary to the creation of the world were not satisfied in the case of God. There are, as I say, many variations of this theme, but the upshot of them all is the same: that God could have had neither the motive nor the desire to create the world. M. D'Asterac, in Anatole France's book *At the Sign of the Reine Pedauque*, puts the difficulty with great force and succinctness:

'The idea of a God at one and the same time a creator and perfect is but a barbarous fancy, a barbarism fit for a Celt or a Saxon. One cannot admit, however little one's intelligence may be formed, that a perfect being can add anything whatever to his perfection, were it but a hazel nut. That stands to reason. God can have no conception. For, being infinite, what can He well conceive? He does not create, for He is beyond time and space, conditions necessary to any construction. Moses was too good a philosopher to teach that the world was created by God.'

*That Man is No Credit to God.*

Suppose that we waive this difficulty and assume that God had some reasonable motive in creating this world, what motive *could* he have had for the creation of man? Is man, objectively considered, such an achievement that his devising could have constituted a purpose which Divine Omnipotence would consider an adequate motive for creation? Looking at the world he has

made and his behaviour in it, it is difficult to say that he is. But even supposing that he is, why such an immense period before he appeared? Why such a prodigious pedigree? Is it really conceivable that God could not have created man without having recourse to the curiously roundabout method whose workings astronomy and geology have explored. For how portentous are the cosmic paraphernalia which have been accumulated in preparation for man—the concentration of energy in the spiral nebulae, the throwing off of stars certainly lifeless from the nebulae, of planets, also almost certainly lifeless and, as it would seem, accidentally from the stars, the vast tracts of empty space, the immense stretches of time running into hundreds of millions of years before life of any kind appeared upon the one planet that could with certainty be said to harbour it, the further hundreds of millions of years before life developed into human life. Was all this, one wondered, necessary? It seemed difficult to believe that it was. If it was, it scarcely looked as if God was omnipotent. But if the cosmic machinery was not necessary, then it seemed pointless. I append a celebrated passage from Bertrand Russell's *Religion and Science*, which crystallized my difficulty:

'Is what has happened hitherto evidence of the good intentions of the universe? The alleged ground for believing this, as we have seen, is that the universe has produced US. I cannot deny it. But are we really so splendid as to justify such a long prologue? The philosophers lay stress on values: they say that we think certain things good, and that since these things are good, we must be very good to think them so. But this is a circular argument. A being with other values might think ours so atrocious as to be proof that we were inspired by Satan. Is there not something a trifle absurd in the spectacle of human beings holding a mirror before themselves, and thinking what they behold so excellent as to prove that a Cosmic Purpose must have been aiming at it all along? Why, in any case, this glorification of Man? How about lions and tigers? They destroy fewer animals or human lives than we do and they are much more beautiful than we are. How about ants? They manage the Corporate State much better than any Fascist. Would not a world of nightingales and larks and deer be better than our human world of cruelty and injustice and war? The believers in Cosmic Purpose make much of

our supposed intelligence, but their writings make one doubt it. If I were granted omnipotence, and millions of years to experiment in, I should not think Man much to boast of as the final result of all my efforts.

'Man, as a curious accident in a backwater, is intelligible: his mixture of virtues and vices is such as might be expected to result from a fortuitous origin. But only abysmal self-complacency can see in Man a reason which Omniscience could consider adequate as a motive for the Creator.'

It almost seems at times as if this view of man were shared by God Himself. Indeed, if the accounts of man's early history, given in the Old Testament, are to be believed, God does not seem to have had any illusions about the quality of His handiwork. If He found it good at first, His satisfaction quickly gave way to discontent which was apt to express itself in extreme irritation. It may, indeed, be questioned whether a creator ever regarded the productions of his inspiration with a greater aversion. So great was the dislike which God entertained for the human race, that He thought of destroying it, and did in fact destroy the vast majority, leaving only a tiny remnant, one single family who, it may be supposed, He hoped would turn out better. Looking at the world, one may feel justified in doubting whether this hope has been realized.

*That the Intentions Attributed to God are Pointless and the Process of Creation Meaningless.*

But let us suppose that this difficulty, the difficulty arising from man's present inadequacy is also waived, and that we suppose man to be capable of ultimately achieving perfection. What, I wondered, could be the motive for creating a temporarily inadequate being, even if he *were* capable of ultimate perfection? In the beginning, we were asked to suppose, there was God, and God was perfect. He creates man with the gift of free will, who uses his gift to do evil and to inflict pain. So much is admitted. Let us now suppose that man improves, that in fact Christ's mission is ultimately successful in the sense that, redeemed from sin, men become in the long run wholly virtuous, and that *all* men become wholly virtuous. Being wholly virtuous, men enter into their inheritance of eternal life and either become blessed

spirits separate from God, but no less perfect than He, or are wholly taken up into and merged in God's infinite being. Let us waive the difficulties suggested by the question whether this consummation ultimately awaits all human beings, or only those who have been saved; let us forget the notion of eternal punishment and the possibility of eternally damned souls; let us eliminate the concept of purgatory; let us cast out of our minds the difficulties raised by the theory of evolution; let us suppose, that is to say, that man is a unique being and that no animals have souls; let us forget that there have ever been transitional species such as Neanderthal man, in regard to whom the question, 'Has he a soul or not?' can be conveniently raised, and let us suppose that all other living creatures either cease to exist or become endowed with souls, even as man has a soul. Waiving all these doubts and difficulties and assuming that all has gone for the best in the best of all possible worlds, we will suppose that *all* living creatures who have souls are ultimately purged of their imperfections and become perfect, even as God is perfect, and that having eternal life, they enjoy its perfection eternally. The process which was started by the creation of the world and continued by that of man will, therefore, on this assumption, end in the achievement of universal perfection. But was not this the condition at the beginning, when there was only a single, all-embracing, perfect God? Assuredly it was. What, then, it may be asked, can be the point of a process which, entailing pain, evil and error by the way and assuming that all goes as well as it can go (which, after all, since there is free will, it may very well not do), has for its end a condition which is identical with its beginning?

*Some Possible Answers.*

*God as an Artist.* As with the problem of pain and evil, the difficulties afforded by the problem of motive have never seemed to me to have received any very convincing answers. The most plausible occurs in the work of the Hindu philosopher Sankaracharya. Sankaracharya conceives of God's activity in creating the world after the model of that of the artist. The artist's creation is an expression or overflow of himself. We may, if we choose, think of it as a *necessary* overflow. As the artist, unable to contain his own

art, so God, unable to contain the plenitude of His own goodness, pours Himself out into the world of His creation. God has no motive for His overflowing, any more than the artist has a motive in writing, painting or composing; the universe which He created is the necessary expression or externalization of Himself. This conception seems to me to outflank some of the difficulties of motive, but only at the cost of creating a fresh difficulty of its own. If we are to take the artist analogy seriously, we cannot avoid noticing that the artist requires something other than himself *in* which to create. Creation, in fact, as we know it, is always *in* a medium, whether of stone, or paint, or of words. If there were no medium for the artist to shape, there would be no works of art. Now the medium is other than the inspiration which finds expression in it. If, then, we accept the implications of the artist analogy, we must postulate a medium other than God into which God's goodness can flow, a medium which He can use as the vehicle of His own inspiration and quicken with His own life. Thus in Plato's *Timaeus* God is represented not as creating, but as informing the world, as a potter does not create but informs the clay he moulds. Now *ex hypothesi* the medium cannot *itself* be something which God has created. Thus the artist analogy suggests a dualistic universe. There is God and there is something other than God, namely, the medium in which God creates. We may, if we are so minded, develop the analogy and conceive that the medium is, as so often happens in the case of the artist, intractable and resists the complete expression of God's conceptions. Such a conception would afford a hint as to the possible source of evil. In fact, once the universe is admitted to be dualistic, the expression of two separate principles, the difficulty of evil assumes a different complexion. I shall have more to say on the subject of Dualism later; here it is sufficient to repeat that it is not a conception which most religions have favoured.

*That God Created Man out of Love.* Another answer to the difficulty of motive is that God created man out of love, because He wanted something to love. When 'God created man', says Saint Catherine of Genoa, 'He did not put Himself in motion for any reason other than His pure love alone'. This view is comforting; it is also flattering to human pride. But is it plausible? There is, first, the logical difficulty involved

by the supposition that one can love that which is not. Before God created man, man did not exist. Yet if the love of man was to be a *motive* of God's creation, God must have felt that love before He created him, must have felt it, therefore, before man existed. But, apart from logic, is it possible to attribute to man that importance in the scheme of things which this view of God's motive seems to demand? It is all very well for the mystic to assert God's surpassing interest in himself—'It appears to me,' says Saint Catherine of Genoa, 'that God has no other business than myself.' And again: 'If man could but see the care which God takes of the soul, he would be struck with stupor within himself.' To the mystic speaking out of his revealed knowledge, such assertions are possible; to the mystic they may even be true; but it is difficult for those to whom this knowledge has not been vouchsafed to share the mystic's confidence. We are too well aware of the imperfections of our nature and the sinfulness of our actions to suppose that we are worthy to excite the love of a perfect being.<sup>1</sup>

Nor has the enlargement of the universe both in time and space, effected by modern science, made this view of the Creator's motive any more plausible. If God had created only one planet and peopled it immediately with human beings, it would be plausible to suppose that He did so because He loved human beings, just as, if this planet had been created a few thousand years ago, to be destroyed a few thousand years hence, it is conceivable that the main purpose to be worked out therein was man's salvation which, in terms of the conception now being considered, might be interpreted as man's growing worthiness of God's love. But waiving the difficulty, why, if God, wanting something to love and making man in order to satisfy His want, did not create man worthy to begin with (a difficulty which, it may be remarked, constitutes a special case of the difficulty which has already been raised under I.A (2) (b.) (vi) where it is suggested that the fact that moral worth *can* only be attained through pain and evil, if indeed it is a fact, is a criticism of a universe which is conditioned by this necessity), one cannot avoid being struck by the almost childish parochialism of such a

<sup>1</sup> I comment on this conception in a later chapter. See Chapter 7, pp. 262, 263.

claim. For it presupposes that man is important enough, not only to be the object of God's love, but, since God created the world in order to love man, to be the justification of the universe. This view, it must be admitted, was easier to take when it was thought that the universe was only a few thousand years old and that man appeared comparatively near its beginning. It was then possible to give man a central position on the cosmic stage, plausible to think that the purpose of the universe was the preparation of a certain number of human souls to be the objects of divine affection. But geology and astronomy make this supposition infinitely more difficult. Nowhere else in space is life known to exist; the period of time during which life in general has subsisted upon this planet is a tiny fraction of the whole; the period of human life a tiny fraction of the period of life in general. Why, then, to repeat our question, these vast and empty tracts of space and time, if God created the universe in order to love man? It is impossible to divorce our view of religion from our knowledge of the universe as a whole. As the size of the universe has grown, man's place in it has correspondingly contracted, and it is to-day difficult to believe that that place is of central importance. Hence it is not only modern science which renders this account of God's motive in creating us unplausible; it is also religion itself. It cannot be to-day—whatever it may have been once—the mark of a really *religious* man to take so parochial a view of the universe, so exalted a view of man, or so human a view of God as the conception of *this* as God's motive entails.

### III. THE DIFFICULTY OF DESIGN

#### *The Character of the Evolutionary Process.*

This is a synthesis of the difficulty of pain and evil and the difficulty of motive, a synthesis, that is to say, of old difficulties which includes a new one. If God designed the universe and designed it for a purpose, then of two things, one, either He designed it for an evil purpose, or designed it for a good one but designed it very badly. The first alternative reflects upon His morality; the second upon His competence. Consider for a moment the arrangements of nature. There are flowers which can



only be fertilized by a particular kind of moth; a bird has exterminated the moth; yet the flowers persist. All the wood anemones which appear in the spring time in the north of England bear their flowers in vain, for no seed appears. There are forms of life, particularly among the echinoderms which, in the sea urchins, sea lilies, bubble stars and other types now extinct, have developed along a series of blind alleys. They have not advanced for hundreds of millions of years, nor have they given rise to other types; they persist, but they persist, by evolutionary standards, pointlessly. The sea squirt, which begins life when an embryo as a vertebrate, loses its vertebræ and becomes, to all intents and purposes, a single organ, a mouth by means of which it adheres throughout its life to a rock. In other words, it goes back on its own past. These are examples of the apparent pointlessness of the evolutionary process, of its stagnation, or of its decadence; the cases of the Ichneumonidae and the *Miastor* midge already quoted are examples of its cruelty.

One of the most disturbing factors of the process is the *nature* of the qualities that make for survival. A creature can survive not because of any biologically advantageous characteristic, but by virtue of characteristics which are biologically disadvantageous to its neighbours and its environment. It can survive by devastation or by destruction; as, for example, by the destruction of young buds and growing plants, or by being a carrier of disease germs. The great sloth is a case in point; it survives by stinking its fellows out of existence. From some points of view man is another case of biologically deleterious survival: he converts a green tract into a desert, destroys the grass that maintains, and cuts down the trees that shelter his life, and converts the nitrogen of the air into fertilizers and explosives with the result that his atmosphere may presently become unbreathable.

Why, we may ask, should there be creatures who devastate and destroy their environment, who come to dead ends, who carry the seeds of their own destruction within themselves, if evolution be designed and well-designed? These considerations are suggested by biological science. They point to a universe which is at best clumsy, at worst malignant.

*The Evidence from Physics.*

Physical science suggests a further reflection. If the object of the universe is the production and perfection of man, what an astonishingly wasteful piece of machinery it is. Consider the bearing of the facts which will be found in any modern book on astronomy. Suppose, for example, that standing on what Sir James Jeans picturesquely calls our microscopic fragment of a grain of sand, we attempt to guess at the nature and purpose of this universe which surrounds our standing point in time and space. Our first impression—or rather Sir James Jeans's—for I am here quoting from his *The Mysterious Universe*—is 'something akin to terror'. Its meaningless distance terrifies us; so, too, do the 'inconceivably long vistas of time which 'dwarf human history to the twinkling of an eye'. From the point of view of the material universe our life is lonely, brief, and insignificant. No less terrifying than this realization is the apparent indifference of the universe to human life. Emotion, ambition and achievement, art, love and religion, all seem equally foreign to its plan. For the most part it is actively hostile to life, for the most part, 'empty space is so cold that all life in it would be frozen; most of the matter in space is so hot as to make life on it impossible'. Space itself is traversed and astronomical bodies continually bombarded by radiations which are inimical to life. The zones within which life is possible, when all are added together, constitute less than a thousand-million-millionth part of the whole of space. Our own narrow, temperate zone of possible life is itself doomed. For our earth, instead of moving for warmth nearer to the dying sun, is moving farther away into the outer cold and darkness. This process must continue until the end, unless some celestial catastrophe intervenes. Moreover, other suns must die like our own, so that any life there may be on other planets must meet the same inglorious end. It is difficult to avoid Sir James's conclusion that, from the point of view of the astronomer, life seems to have stumbled by accident into 'a universe which was clearly not designed for life'. It is our destiny 'to stay clinging on to a fragment of sand until we are frozen off, to strut our tiny hour on our tiny stage with the knowledge that our aspirations are all doomed to final frustration, and that our achievements must perish

with our race, leaving the universe as though we had never been'.

Granted the religious view of the universe, granted that at its heart is a spirit akin to ours and concerned in our welfare, then this prodigious, this inhuman cosmic machinery seems without point or meaning. It is from the point of view of the religious hypothesis, a mere waste. If it were to be regarded as justifying *any* cosmic conclusion, it would be that the production of life was *not* the object of the universe; and, if life was not its object, human life was its object still less.

*Possible Interpretations of God's Design.*

If in spite of these considerations, we are to insist that there is design, what sort of design does the available evidence suggest? The evidence which is chiefly relevant is the evidence provided by the spectacle of life itself. Let us, then, suppose ourselves sitting in a theatre examining, from the detached point of view of the spectators, the play that is being enacted on the boards of the universe. What kind of motive can we reasonably attribute to its author? It is this question which, I think, presents itself more forcibly than any other to a modern mind, newly conscious of the needs which religion has satisfied in the past and concerned, therefore, to examine anew the evidence on which the religious hypothesis is based. How, one wants to know, putting it in the bluntest terms, can a good God have made this world? Even those who accept the theistic hypothesis find their faith exercised, their loyalty strained, by this question. There has recently been published a small sixpenny book entitled *Good God, a Study of His Character and Activity*, by John Hadham, which has achieved a very considerable circulation. At the beginning of his book, Mr. Hadham poses precisely this question: 'What interests me,' he writes, 'is not whether He (God) exists, but assuming He exists, what He is like and what on earth He is up to at the present moment. I mean "what on earth" literally. Of the home life of God I know nothing and I am equally ignorant of his relations with other planets and universes. But I *am* concerned with this world in which I happen to live, and I consider it important to have as clear a picture as possible of the person who made it, and, what is more difficult to explain, did it on purpose, and is quite satisfied with how it is going on.'

What kind of a picture, then, do the facts suggest? It is a question which in the past I have again and again asked myself. I am not concerned at the moment to consider whether there may be a hidden meaning which belies the surface appearance. I am concerned only with the surface appearance, and since I have already called myself as witness more than once, I will suppose that the hypothetical spectator is a great poet, is in fact Thomas Hardy.

*Hardy's Universe.*

Now the view which Hardy seems in general disposed to take is of a universe guided, but guided by an unheeding hand, the hand of one who takes no interest in the effects that result from His guidance. To this power that determines events Hardy gives a variety of names. He terms it 'Fate', 'Destiny', 'Chance', or the 'Prime Mover'. Common to all these terms is the conception of a blind, unfeeling, unthinking will which, indifferent alike to human suffering and human happiness, fares on its way because it must, dragging the universe at its heels. In its hands human beings are automata, puppets twitched into love and war by the heedless showman who pulls their strings, falling into calamity not because they ought, but because they must. Disaster, in other words, occurs not because it is deserved, but because it is fated. If the power furthers man's efforts, it furthers them without purpose; if it thwarts, it thwarts without malignity. Epithets used to describe its nature are 'viewless', 'voiceless', 'unmotivated', 'unimpassioned', 'nescient', 'unseeing', 'above forethinking'. Being unconscious, it fares on its interminable path not because it wishes, but as driven by the laws of its own nature.

*'Like a knitter drowsed,  
Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness  
The Will has woven with an absent heed  
Since life first was; and ever will so weave.'*

'Will' seems a curious word, since willing seems to imply consciousness; yet Hardy's 'Will' is unconscious. This unconscious will is all-pervasive. It is, therefore, immanent in all happenings; every event is an expression or result of its activity:—

*'It works unconsciously, as heretofore,  
Eternal artistries in Circumstance  
Whose patterns, . . .  
Seem in themselves its single listless aim,  
And not their consequence,'*

God, then, if the power behind the universe may be personified under such a name, is fundamentally a-moral. He does not rule the world by ethical standards because He Himself knows nothing of such standards. There is a poem of Hardy's—*New Year's Eve*—in which the poet imagines an earth dweller to visit God and hold conversation with Him on the state of the world. The earth dweller's attitude is one of remonstrance that God should have consented to make such a world:—

*'Yea, Sire: why shaped you us, "who in  
This tabernacle groan"—  
If ever a joy be found herein,  
Such joy no man had wished to win  
If he had never known!'*

*Then he: 'My labours—logicless—  
You may explain; not I:  
Sense-sealed I have wrought, without a guess  
That I evolved a Consciousness  
To ask for reasons why.*

*'Strange that ephemeral creatures who  
By my own ordering are,  
Should see the shortness of my view,  
Use ethic tests I never knew,  
Or made provision for!'*

*He sank to raptness as of yore,  
And opening New Year's Day  
Wove it by rote as theretofore,  
And went on working evermore  
In his unweeting way.*

God, it will be noted, is surprised by man's application of ethical standards to His handiwork and, when He understands what they mean, repudiates them. He knows nothing of the concepts of good and bad, right and wrong, just and unjust. These are mere figments in the brains of His creatures which cannot conceivably be applied to Himself.

Such, in brief, is the view which Hardy seems normally disposed to take; but there are variations. One variation is the suggestion that God made the world, set it going, and then forgot all about it. This view is set out in a remarkable poem called *God-Forgotten*, from which I quote some verses:—

*I towered far, and lo! I stood within  
The presence of the Lord Most High,  
Sent thither by the sons of Earth, to win  
Some answer to their cry.*

—‘*The Earth, sayest thou? The Human race?  
By Me created? Sad its lot?  
Nay: I have no remembrance of such place:  
Such world I fashioned not.*’—

—‘*O Lord, forgive me when I say  
Thou spakest the word and made it all.*’—  
‘*The Earth of men—let me bethink me . . . Yea!  
I dimly do recall*

‘*Some tiny sphere I built long back  
(Mid millions of such shapes of mine)  
So named . . . It perished, surely—not a wrack  
Remaining, or a sign?*

‘*It lost my interest from the first,  
My aims therefor succeeding ill;  
Haply it died of doing as it durst?*’  
‘*Lord, it existeth still.*’—

‘*Dark, then, its life! For not a cry  
Of aught it bears do I now hear;  
Of its own acts the threads were snapt whereby  
Its plaints had reached mine ear.*

*'It used to ask for gifts of good,  
Till came its severance, self-entailed,  
When sudden silence on that side ensued,  
And has till now prevailed.*

*'All other orbs have kept in touch;  
Their voicings reach me speedily:  
Thy people took upon them overmuch  
In sundering them from me!*

*'And it is strange—though sad enough—  
Earth's race should think that one whose call  
Frames, daily, shining spheres of flawless stuff  
Must heed their tainted ball! . . .'*

God, Hardy seems to be saying, has lost contact with the world, and seeing what it has become, does not wish to renew it.

#### *God's Humour.*

Or there is the variation which represents God as creating life for the pleasure of contemplating the anomalies which it engenders. God, in short, is a satirical joker; having created the world to be His stage, He watches the play in amused detachment from the wings. The most celebrated expression of this attitude occurs in Bertrand Russell's parable in which Mephistopheles explains to Dr. Faustus in his study the mood in which God undertook the labour of creation.

'The endless praises of the choirs of angels had begun to grow wearisome; for, after all, did he not deserve their praise? Had he not given them endless joy? Would it not be more amusing to obtain undeserved praise, to be worshipped by beings whom he tortured? He smiled inwardly, and resolved that the great drama should be performed.

'For countless ages the hot nebula whirled aimlessly through space. At length it began to take shape, the central mass threw off planets, the planets cooled, boiling seas and burning mountains heaved and tossed, from black masses of cloud hot sheets of rain deluged the barely solid crust. And now the first germ of life grew in the depths of the ocean, and developed rapidly in the

fructifying warmth into vast forest trees, huge ferns springing from the damp mould, sea monsters breeding, fighting, devouring, and passing away. And from the monsters, as the play unfolded itself, Man was born, with the power of thought, the knowledge of good and evil, and the cruel thirst for worship. And Man saw that all is passing in this mad, monstrous world, that all is struggling to snatch, at any cost, a few brief moments of life before Death's inexorable decree. And Man said: "There is a hidden purpose, could we but fathom it, and the purpose is good; for we must reverence something, and in the visible world there is nothing worthy of reverence." And Man stood aside from the struggle, resolving that God intended harmony to come out of chaos by human efforts. And when he followed the instincts which God had transmitted to him from his ancestry of beasts of prey, he called it Sin, and asked God to forgive him. But he doubted whether he could be justly forgiven, until he invented a divine Plan by which God's wrath was to have been appeased. And seeing the present was bad, he made it yet worse, that thereby the future might be better. And he gave God thanks for the strength that enabled him to forgo even the joys that were possible. And God smiled; and when he saw that Man had become perfect in renunciation and worship, he sent another sun through the sky, which crashed into Man's sun; and all returned again to nebula.

"Yes," he murmured, "it was a good play; I will have it performed again."

God, then, is a humorist who created us for the gratification of His ironic spirit. Those who are by temperament attracted to this form of explanation not unnaturally lay stress on the hazards and uncertainties of existence. Our lives, they point out, are determined by events over which we have no control; our intentions are frustrated by circumstance; through accident our most careful plans go awry.

The plots of Hardy's novels are built round this conception of 'haphazard'. The note which Tess sends to Angel Clare before their marriage, confessing her seduction by D'Urberville, goes under the carpet as well as under the door; Clym happens to be asleep when Mrs. Yeobright calls, and fails to hear her knock; a mist springs up when the coffin containing the corpse of Fanny



Robin is being carried to Weatherbury, with the result that the burial is delayed until the morning and Bathsheba discovers the coffin's occupant. With the possible exception of Lady Constantine and Swithin St. Cleeve in an early and neglected work, *Two on a Tower*, the lives of Jude and of Tess are beset by a greater number of these aggravations of circumstance than those of any others of Hardy's heroes and heroines. At the end of *Tess* Hardy permits himself a single phrase of comment, expressing the view of the deity to which the novel irresistibly points:

'Justice was done and the President of the Immortals . . . had finished his sport with Tess.'

But it is once more to the poems that one must turn for the most explicit expression of this strain in Hardy's philosophy. In a poem entitled *Nature's Questioning*, the poet converses with the dumb furniture of nature, 'the field, flock, and lonely tree', cowed yet questioning, demanding to be told why they are here at all.

*'We wonder, ever wonder, why we find us here!'*

*'Has some Vast Imbecility,  
Mighty to build and blend  
But impotent to tend,  
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?'*

*'Or come we of an Automaton  
Unconscious of our pains? . . .  
Or are we live remains  
Of Godhead dying downwards, brain and eye now gone?'*

*'Or is it that some high Plan betides,  
As yet not understood,  
Of Evil stormed by Good,  
We the Forlorn Hope over which Achievement strides?'*

*Thus things around. No answerer I . . .  
Meanwhile the winds, and rains,  
And Earth's old glooms and pains  
Are still the same, and Death and glad Life neighbour nigh.*

In this poem most of Hardy's alternative views are presented; that God made the world as a joke; that having made it, He left

it to itself; that He is an unconscious automaton and the universe a machine; that He existed once but is dying, and that the universe is a moribund universe, the burnt stick of the upward ascending rocket; or, just conceivably, that there is a plan, a plan to overcome evil by good, and that we are the instruments of its working.

According to the views so far considered, the conception of God's character varies from fair to indifferent. He is unconscious or forgetful; He does the best He can in adverse circumstances; He is imbued with high if unsuccessful endeavour; at the worst, He is a humorist in bad taste.

*The Gods of A. E. Housman and T. E. Brown.*

Others have gone farther and represented God as a devil, as a being, that is to say, morally worse than the worst man. Such a view of the deity is a cry of pain, a curse wrung from men by sufferings past their bearing. My best friend was a conscientious objector in the last war who, nevertheless, had not the courage to avow his convictions. He went to fight without the support of the belief that his sufferings were endured in a good cause. He was convinced, rather, that it was a bad cause and that by consenting to fight he had betrayed the faith that was in him. For such a one the war was, indeed, a hell. He left behind a mass of papers, many of them in diary form, which were subsequently published under the title *The Diary of a Dead Officer*, and achieved a considerable reputation during the period of reaction against the war through which the country passed in 1919 and 1920. This is how my friend wrote of God in his diary:

'Most of all now I reject the presumption that I worship a God by Whose never-wronging hand I conceive all the present woe to have been brought upon the now-living generation of mankind. If there is a God at all responsible for governing the earth, I hate and abominate Him—I rather despise Him. But I do not think there is one. We only fall into the habit of calling down curses on a God Whom we believe not to exist, because the constant references to His beneficence are so maddening that anger stings us to a retort that is really illogical.'

If there is a God, in short, He must be a devil, whom we should approach with a curse upon our lips. As Housman puts it in his unforgettable lines:—

*' We for a certainty are not the first,  
Have sat in taverns while the tempest hurled  
Their hopeful plans to emptiness, and cursed  
Whatever brute and blackguard made the world.'*

And then comes the question, if so to read the appearance of things is to misread them, why are the appearances deceptive? If, to see this world as the handiwork of a 'brute and blackguard' is to belie God's character, why did He choose to disguise Himself? Why in fact couldn't He make Himself plain? Was it because of bad craftsmanship, so that, wanting to make a world which clearly expressed his intentions and reflected His goodness, He yet did not know how to do so? Or was it deliberate deception, so that man was deceived because God had some purpose in misleading him? Or was it even delight in mystification for its own sake? The question is put with great force in the first half of T. E. Brown's poem entitled *Question and Answer*. The poet is prompted to speculate by the beauty of a sunset at Chagford. What does it mean?

*' But is it speech  
Wherewith they strive to reach  
Our poor inadequate souls?  
The round earth rolls;  
I cannot hear it hum—  
The stars are dumb—  
The voices of the world are in my ear  
A sensuous murmur. Nothing speaks  
But man, my fellow—him I hear,  
And understand; but beasts and birds  
And winds and waves are destitute of words.  
What is the alphabet  
The gods have set?  
What babbling! what delusion!  
And in these sunset tints  
What gay confusion!  
Man prints  
His meaning, has a letter  
Determinate. I know that it is better*

*Than all this cumbrous hieroglyph—  
 The For, the If  
 Are growth of man's analysis:  
 The gods in bliss  
 Scrabble a baby jargon on the skies  
 For us to analyse!  
 Cumbrous? nay, idiotic—  
 A party-coloured symbolism,  
 The fragments of a shivered prism.'*

But if it is speech, how obscure it is and how much of it is wasted upon those who cannot see or hear.

*. . . ' The leech  
 Looks from its muddy lair,  
 And sees a silly something in the air—  
 Call you this speech?  
 O, God, if it be speech,  
 Speak plainer,  
 If Thou would'st teach  
 That I shall be a gainer!  
 The age of picture-alphabets is gone:  
 We are not now so weak;  
 We are too old to con  
 The horn-book of our youth. Time lags—  
 O, rip this obsolete blazon into rags!  
 And speak! O, speak!'*

The second half of the poem consists of God's answer. Here are one or two salient passages:

*' I am old and blind;  
 I have no speech  
 Wherewith to reach  
 Your quick-selecting ears.  
 And yet I mark your tears;  
 And yet I would be kind.  
 And so I strain  
 To speak, as now;*

*And, in more cheerful vein,  
 You haply will allow  
 I make My meaning fairly plain.  
 Therefore it is I store  
 Such beauty in the clouds, and on the shore  
 Make foam-flakes glisten; therefore you have seen  
 This sunset; therefore 'tis the green  
 And lusty grass  
 Hath come to pass  
 And flame  
 Lies sparkling in the dews—  
 And yet I cannot choose  
 But do the same!'*

*' And this  
 Is certain: never be afraid!  
 I love what I have made,  
 I know this is not wit,  
 This is not to be clever,  
 Or anything whatever.  
 You see, I am a servant, that is it:  
 You've hit  
 The mark—a servant: for the other word—  
 Why, you are Lord, if any one is Lord.'*

One may be pardoned for finding God's answer unconvincing. Or rather, it is convincing only if it is taken to be the answer of a limited God, determined by laws outside His control, doing the best He can in circumstances which are not of His making. In fact we are brought back again to the concept of a dualist universe in which besides God there is something other than God, by which God is limited and against which He struggles.

*The Conclusion: Why, then, Postulate a God?*

The evidence for God is far from plain. The evidence for a good God is in the highest degree dubious; so at least, I have always believed. That being so, why, I asked myself, introduce the conception of God at all? Because there must be a first cause? But as a teacher of philosophy I know very well the arguments

against the hypothesis of a first cause. This is no place to enter into a discussion of these arguments, but their general purport is sufficiently clear. If it be said that the universe must have a cause, since it could not have arisen from nothing, and that God was the cause, the question arises why does not the same consideration apply in the case of God? Must He too not have had a cause? One must, presumably, begin with something. If the question, "How did the 'something' get there" is unanswerable—and I daresay it is, one may as well accept the fact that the beginning of things is inconceivable, a mystery—then, mystery for mystery, one might just as well accept the mystery of the universe without trying to solve it, as the mystery of God. One might, that is to say, just as well begin with a mysterious universe, *there* from the first, as with a mysterious God *there* from the first.

It does not, in short, help matters to invoke a God to explain how the universe 'got there,' unless we are prepared to say how the God 'got there'.

If the reply to this is that, since God is by definition self-explanatory and self-sufficient, He has always been there, and that He is, therefore, ultimate and eternal, then the question arises, how could such an ultimate and eternal God have been the cause of a temporary universe existing in time?

The argument at this point leads us into abstruse regions where we cannot follow it. From them we emerge confronted with a dilemma. The physical world as we know it is a series of causally related events in space time. Either God is Himself within this series of events, or He is not. If He is, then He too, by virtue of the fact that He is a member of the causal series of events, must have had a cause. If He is not, then it is difficult to see how He can be causally related to the series in which He has no membership.

I am not saying that these difficulties cannot be overcome, or at least met. We can say that the mode of God's causation of the world is different from the mode according to which events in the world cause one another; or we may say that the whole conception of God's creation is beyond our understanding. The point I am making is not so much that the difficulties cannot be met, as that the motive to meet and, if possible, overcome them disappears, if the God who emerges from their overthrow

has the dubious moral and intellectual qualities suggested by the world and emphasized by the poets; if, for example, He is absent-minded and forgets the world He has created, or is incompetent and unable to stamp His designs clearly upon it, or non-moral and unable to comprehend ethical standards or their application to His work, or a sadist, or a practical joker. . . .

Why, then, I asked myself, go out of one's way to encounter all the difficulties attaching to the rehabilitation of a first cause, if this were the figure that one was required by a plain reading of the evidence to rehabilitate? Why, in fact, bring in God at all? It would be at once more prudent and less depressing to remain an agnostic. Having reached this point in one's reasoning, one did not, if one were wise, positively deny the existence of God. One had grown too wary to assert either that there was or was not God. What one did do was to suspend judgement, maintaining that this was a question to which the answer was unknown and likely to remain so.

Before I take leave of these reasons for agnosticism and the intellectual and moral mood from which they spring, I want to ask a question and to make a protest.

### *A Question and a Protest.*

Religious literature condemns the agnostic. Those who believe are not content to disagree with those who do not; they insist upon denouncing them. They see in doubt not so much intellectual difficulty as moral obliquity. Why is this? What virtue is there, I should like to know, in belief as such, particularly in belief that is not true or that cannot be known to be true? 'Oh, but', it will be said, 'the belief is true and in refusing to share it you are wilfully shutting your eyes to the truth.' I reply that whether it is true or not is precisely the point now at issue, and retort that I am totally unable to understand why it should be deemed wicked in a man *not* to entertain a particular belief, when the evidence against it appears to him to be stronger than the evidence for it, or when there appears to be no sufficient evidence for it. Is it his fault that the evidence seems to him insufficient?

Now I contend that the arguments adduced in this chapter against the orthodox theistic hypothesis are not contemptible.

They do constitute real difficulties for the religious hypothesis which it is not easy to overcome; they suggest questions which are not readily answered. It may well be doubted whether they ever have been answered. What view, then, in the face of these real difficulties and these unanswered questions can we take of such a passage as the following, which I quote from one of Donne's Sermons as typical of much theological literature:

'God affords no man the comfort, the false comfort, of Atheism: He will not allow a pretending Atheist the power to flatter himself, so far as seriously to think there is no God. He must pull out his own eyes, and see no creature, before he can say, he sees no God; he must be no man and quench his reasonable soul before he can say to himself, there is no God.'

In this passage the poor agnostic—Donne speaks of the atheist, but his censure applies equally to the agnostic—is not even permitted to believe what he believes and to disbelieve what he disbelieves. He must, thinks Donne, be pretending. Why pretending? Because, presumably, the arguments for God are so overwhelming that nobody *could* gainsay them, the revelation of God so convincing that nobody could be blind to it. As one who has been for thirty years an agnostic, I must before proceeding further with this book, which amounts to a hesitating revision of agnosticism, emphatically insist that this is not so, and enter a protest against the dogmatic presumption and intellectual arrogance of those who have asserted that it *is* so, and that anybody who doubts that it is so must be either a fool or a knave.



## Chapter 3

# THE OBTRUSIVENESS OF EVIL

### *The Paradox.*

As I pointed out in the first chapter, the attitude to evil of many of my generation has changed. They are no longer disposed to write off evil as a by-product of circumstance, a temporary phenomenon due to inadequate social and incomplete psychological development which will disappear in an earthly Utopia. They are increasingly disposed to accept it as a real and possibly incorrigible factor in the world and, therefore, in man's nature.

Now, paradoxically, it is this fact, the fact of one's conviction of the objective reality of evil, that imparts to the mind the disposition to search for God and to turn towards Him when He is found. That this is indeed a paradox—because there is evil, therefore there *must* be God who is good—I insist. If the world were full of good and only of good, then it would be reasonable to suppose that it was created by a wholly good being; but to find the texture of things shot through with evil, to convince oneself that the evil is real and ineradicable, and *then* to conclude that, nevertheless and in spite of this, nay, even because of this, there must be God—this, it may well be said, is to allow one's wishes, not one's reason to dictate one's conclusions. 'Because', says the critic, 'it is intolerable to you to accept the fact of evil simply as given, brute fact, a fact which there is no assurance of overcoming or even, perhaps, of diminishing, therefore you invoke a supernatural and all-powerful being by whose help (which apparently you take for granted) you convince yourself that in your own life and character you will be able to diminish evil, if not to overcome it. The brute-givenness of evil being unacceptable to you, you call in your wishes not your reason, to enlist a good God to help you dispose of it. Now wishes may breed thoughts but they do not father evidence.'

*The New Relevance of the Problem of Evil.*

'Moreover,' the critic might add, 'this change of front which you allege on your part and on that of your contemporaries argues a shallow mind. There is nothing new in the evil which you see in the world to-day; it has always been there. Admittedly in the Victorian age when you were growing up, a member of the most favoured class, and of the most favoured generation of the most favoured class in the most favoured country that the world has ever seen, evil may have seemed to you a little less marked, a little less *usual* than usual; but, of course, it was still there. What is more, the slightest acquaintance with human history should have assured you that the apparent comparative feebleness of evil in your youth was a wholly exceptional condition of affairs. It was a condition which had not obtained in the past and which seemed unlikely, if history was to be taken as a guide, to continue in the future. The Victorian and Edwardian ages in England were abnormal; they constituted a wholly unrepresentative little pocket of security and decency in the immense desert of man's beastliness and misery. Now that the world has returned to normal, it is the mark of a simpleton to exhibit this naïve surprise at the quantity and quality of its wickedness. For this wickedness is no new thing, and, being no new thing, raises no new theological problem. The records were always there for you to read, and if you had taken the trouble to read intelligently, you would have learnt that it was precisely upon this fact of evil that the most urgent theological discussions had turned in the past, and what is more, that the fact was not then thought incompatible with the divine government of the world.'

'The classic exposition of the doctrine that the world's miseries'—and here I am venturing to quote one of my own critics<sup>1</sup>—'are compatible with its creation and guidance by a wholly good being comes from Boethius, waiting in prison to be beaten to death, and from Saint Augustine meditating upon the sack of Rome.'

These objections and reproofs, for so I take them to be, have an importance which I am far from wishing to belittle.

In regard to the second, I have, indeed, no defence to make. It was because the world during these early years of the twentieth

<sup>1</sup> Mr. C. S. Lewis, in an article in the *Spectator* of January 31st, 1941.

some hours to free itself, and was partially exhausted. On my approach to free it, it manifested every symptom of terror and distress. In my clumsy efforts to release the leg, I succeeded only in breaking it, and thereupon destroyed the jackdaw to save it from a slow death involving further terror and pain. Were it not for the painfulness of the illustration, I should have found difficulty in denying myself the temptation of inviting the Rev. Martyn Saunders to view its subject.

There is the further contention that pain does not present any 'problem' to the animals since they do not *know* that they suffer. Possibly, possibly not. It depends upon what is meant by the word 'know'. In one sense of that word, the sense in which to know is to be self-conscious, they do not 'know' that they suffer; in another sense, in which to 'know' is to feel, they do. But the point is surely immaterial, since we at any rate know that animals suffer—at least some of us *think* that we know that they do—and the problem therefore remains for us, why should a God who is benevolent and all-powerful allow suffering to be inflicted on His innocent creatures? If we are told that He does not allow it because we only mistakenly suppose that they suffer, the problem becomes, why does He deliberately allow his creatures, namely ourselves, to fall into error by falsely attributing suffering to other creatures?

(2) *The Suggestion that Physical Pain is not Evil because it is not a Moral Evil.*

Finally it is suggested in the letter from which I have quoted, that physical pain is not evil. 'Of *moral* evil', we are told, Nature 'knows nothing.' The implications seem to be:

- (i) that there is only one kind of evil, namely, moral evil, and
- (ii) that pain is not of that kind.

Both these propositions seem to me to be unwarrantable dogmas. It is, of course, possible to define the words 'moral' and 'evil' in such a way that all evil is moral evil. Let us suppose that, provisionally, we were to accept such a definition; then the question arises, is pain evil in this sense, or not? The answer would appear to depend on the system of ethics that one adopts. If, for example, one adopts a system of utilitarian ethics, one will hold not only that pain is an evil, but that it is the only evil; for

if the utilitarians are right, actions are to be judged by their consequences, a morally right action being one which increases happiness, a morally wrong action one that decreases happiness and increases suffering.

Nor is it necessary to accept the utilitarian view to the extent of maintaining that the *only* quality of the consequences that is entitled to be taken into account when we are assessing their value, is their quality of pleasantness or the reverse. For it is quite possible, and I should say, quite reasonable, to hold that there are a number of goods in addition to happiness—beauty, for instance, knowledge and moral virtue—and that the production of any one of these gives value to the consequence of actions. Happiness, then, on this view, which, as I say, seems to me to be a reasonable one, is a good, though it is not the only good, and pain an evil, though it is not the only evil. Nor do I see how it is possible, except at the cost of gross paradox, to deny this obvious fact.

For my part, I would go farther and maintain that though happiness is not the only good, yet no state of consciousness can be wholly good unless it contains at least some happiness, and that though pain is not the only evil, nevertheless no mental state can be wholly good if it contains some pain. These conclusions are based upon arguments which belong to philosophical ethics, and I cannot enter into them here.<sup>1</sup> I have mentioned them because they seem to me to be reasonable conclusions which many philosophers hold and to which most commonsense people would agree. If we accept them, we shall say that an action is morally right if it produces happiness and/or certain goods other than happiness, morally wrong if it produces pain and/or certain evils other than pain, when it might have produced happiness. Now it is entailed by this definition of right actions and wrong actions that, when we are considering the consequences of an action, we must account happiness a good and pain an evil. Pain, then, is, on this view, a moral evil, being the result of a morally wrong action.

The restriction of the notion of evil to *moral* evil is one of the most important reasons which have led people to doubt whether

<sup>1</sup> I have tried to set them out at length in my *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*, Chapter XII.

pain is an evil, but it is not the only reason. Its implications have been reinforced by a distinction which is often made between physical and mental pain. Now physical pain is not a *moral* evil. Therefore, it is urged, physical pain is not an evil. This is, I think, the presumption which underlies the assertion so frequently made that the animal world is free from evil since the animals, it is assumed, feel only physical pain.

*Discussion of the Distinction between Physical and Mental Pain.*

The distinction between physical and mental pain seems to me to be difficult to sustain. On examination most of the alleged differences between the two pains disappear. In the first place, all pain is mental in the sense that the feeling of pain is a psychological and not a physical event. The *cause* of the feeling may be physical, but the feeling itself is, it is obvious, psychological; it is, that is to say, an event in the biography of the mind; it is not the movement of a piece of matter in the body. If the mind is temporarily out of action, as for example, when one is unconscious, one does not feel pain, and if pain is not felt, then there is no pain. Damage, decay, breakages, lesions, growths, all these which are physical happenings may occur without being felt, but pain cannot so occur, for the simple reason that pain is not a physical event.

When this is pointed out, most people fall back upon a distinction in terms of origins. Mental pains, they say, are those which originate or are caused in the mind, physical pains in the body. But this distinction in terms of origin or place of causation leads to difficulties of its own. To begin with, there are some physical events in the causal ancestry of most mental pains, if not of all of them. Thus if I were to receive a telegram informing me that my wife was dead, and were to experience grief at the news, the immediate cause of my grief, that is to say, of my mental pain, would be certain physical events taking place at the retinas of my eyes, along the optic nerves and in the nerve cells of the brain, resulting from the stimulation of the retinas by certain marks on a buff-coloured piece of paper.

How, then, are the origins of mental and physical pains respectively to be distinguished? One way of distinguishing them would be to say that though physical events do undoubtedly occur in the

causal ancestry of mental pain, they are not such as are usually productive of pain, either mental or physical. Thus the events at the retinas of the eyes and along the optic nerves caused by the stimulus of the black marks on the buff background in the telegram instance, are not usually causal factors in the production of pain. They are the intermediaries or conveyers of pain rather than its causes; and in the telegram case they are intermediaries or conveyers of pain only because of the *meaning* which they are instrumental in conveying. The real cause of the pain then, we should say, is the *meaning* of the telegram, or rather the fact to which the meaning refers, and the events at the retinas and along the optic nerves are merely the machinery by means of which the meaning of the fact is conveyed to us. Let us contrast this case with that in which somebody extracts my teeth without giving me an anæsthetic. I call the pain which this operation entails physical because the physical happenings involved are such as would normally cause pain; they are, that is to say, not merely intermediaries of pain; they may more properly be described as its causes.

It would seem, then, that the distinction between mental and physical pain is not wholly explicable in terms of their respective modes of origin. It is not the case that mental pains have wholly mental causes or origins, physical pains wholly physical. The difference seems to depend upon whether the physical events involved in the causation of the pain are such as would *normally* cause pain or not. If they are not, but are nevertheless causal factors or intermediaries in the production of pain, so that after they have occurred, pain is felt, we say that the pain is mental. We may put this conclusion in a general way by saying that in the case of so-called mental pains, the physical factors involved in their causation are not such as are important.

Now it is obvious that when we are talking about what is more or what is less important, or whether a physical event is of a sort which usually does or does not cause pain, we are talking about differences not of kind but of degree. And in practice the two classes of cases, those in which the pain would normally be said to be mentally and those in which it would normally be said to be physically caused, approximate and overlap. Consider, for example, the case of fear.

*The Causation of Fear.*

The feeling of fear would, I suppose, normally be accounted a mental pain, a fact which renders the view that animals feel only physical pain extremely unpalatable; for an animal's life is, as Hudson points out in the passage quoted above,<sup>1</sup> overshadowed by fear.

Now in the obvious sense already mentioned, the sense in which *all* pain is mental, the feeling of fear is undoubtedly a mental pain. But what of its causation? I feel fear when the adrenal glands have secreted certain substances which cause the liver to release an extra supply of sugar which is carried in the blood stream in the form of glycogen to the heart, the lungs, and the muscles.

Now it may be the case that these bodily events originate from a mental cause. Let us suppose, for example, that it is because I have seen a ghost that my adrenal glands secrete. The act of seeing, though it has physical causes, for example events occurring at the retinas of the eyes, along the optic nerves, in the brain, and so on, is a mental event. But although this mental event of seeing *may* be the cause of the bodily events and of the fear that accompanies them, it is quite possible to maintain, as William James did, that the cause of the feeling of fear is not the mental act of seeing the ghost, but is the physical events which follow from or accompany it. As James paradoxically put it, 'I am sorry because I weep, feel glad because I laugh'. If James's account is true, the feeling of fear is physically caused in precisely the same way and in the same sense as the feeling of pain due to a pinprick is physically caused. In the case of the pinprick, the point of a metal substance entering the flesh of my finger stimulates the nerve terminals, as a result of which electric currents pass along the receptor nervous system and cause events in the brain, as a result of which I feel pain. In the case of the ghost, the events at the retina and along the optic cord cause the adrenal glands to secrete fluid, as a result of which certain other physical events occur, as a result of which I experience a feeling of fear.

The whole question of the causation of the emotions is highly controversial and I do not wish to assert that William James's

<sup>1</sup> See p. 73.

account of the causation of fear is correct and that the two cases, the fear case and the pinprick case are, therefore, on all fours in all respects. It is sufficient for my purpose to point out that the feeling of fear and the events concerned in the causation of the feeling constitute a highly complex process. Both bodily and mental events occur, and it is extremely difficult to say which is the cause of which. The prudent course is to refrain from any assertion on the subject of causation and to say merely that the mental event which is the feeling of fear is accompanied by certain physical events, namely, the secretion of the adrenal glands, and so on. But even this non-committal assertion destroys the distinction between mentally caused mental pains and physically caused mental pains, since we cannot with confidence assign the pain of fear either to the one class or to the other. What we *can* say is that in the causation of the fear feeling a complex series of events is involved, that some of these events are mental, and some physical, and that unless all of them occurred there would be no feeling of fear.

The upshot of the discussion is that between mental pains and physical there is no such difference of principle as would justify us in asserting that pains falling into the one category may be judged ethically because their cause is mental, while pains falling into the other category cannot be so judged because their cause is physical; the truth of the matter being, that all pains are mental, and that both physical and mental factors are present in the chain of events which precedes their occurrence.

It would seem to follow that there is no ground for excluding happenings in the animal world from the scope of ethical judgement on the ground that the pain which they involve is *only* physical, unless we are prepared to do what those who take this line are certainly not prepared to do, and say that all pain of whatever kind, including the painful feeling of fear experienced by the coward, is to be exempted from the scope of moral judgement. So much having been said as to the respects in which so-called mental and so-called physical pains are alike and as to the respects in which they are different, I propose from now on to speak of them as if they *were* different, it being understood that I am in strictness speaking only of those respects in which they are different.



*That Physical Pain is indeed an Evil.*

I have adopted the expression 'only physical' from the arguments of those whose views I am engaged in controverting. I cannot, however, allow its implications to pass without challenge, for the word 'only' suggests that physical pain, even if it is evil, is not as great an evil as mental or moral pain. Is there any sense at all in which this is true? The question is not one which can be answered by argument, so I must content myself with asserting with all the force of a strongly held conviction, that in no sense whatever does it seem to me to be true. When we suffer from violent physical pain, it seems to us to be an evil so great that most of us would opt for any pain of the mind or humiliation of the spirit, provided only that the physical pain should stop. I emphasize the word 'most' for I am fully aware of the prodigious and heroic fortitude which some human beings have shown under physical torture. It has happened, and happened many times, that men and women who have been subjected to the most appalling physical torments have been told and have believed that their torments would cease if they would recant, confess, affix their signatures to a piece of paper. Yet they have not recanted and the torture has persisted, until they died. I know that there have been such cases, but I know also that they have been exceptional. Moreover, we *all* know them to be exceptional, and the measure of their 'exceptionalness' is the amazed admiration with which we respond to them. For what is the unuttered thought that underlies our astonishment? 'I would not have stood firm. I cannot understand how they could have stood firm; perhaps God helped them; or perhaps they had achieved such a mastery of mind over body that they did not feel, or though feeling, were enabled to transcend their pain.' Such, I insist, is the ordinary man's normal reaction to the accounts of the torture-enduring martyrs, and the implication of this reaction is that physical pain is such an overwhelming evil that, if only it be bad enough, most of us will betray our gods, sign the death warrant of our dearest friends, recant our most cherished convictions, drink the ultimate dregs of the cup of dishonour, provided only that it shall stop. When somebody does not do these things, we are overcome with amazement and

admiration. And rightly; for one man who stands firm under the torture, there are twenty who give way. All governments, civil and ecclesiastical, have known that it is so; had they not known it, they would not have resorted so habitually to the use of torture as an instrument of policy.

But to come to less spectacular cases; who, suffering from a violent attack of toothache, does not know that it is an evil, an evil so great that he will face the worst horrors of the dentist's chair, in order that the tooth and the evil may be stopped? It is sometimes said that pain fortifies the spirit and improves the character, and that it is not, therefore, wholly bad. I deny it. One of the most distressing features of physical pain—and here, it is obvious, I am not arguing but confessing—is its apparent pointlessness. 'What possible good can it do to anybody that I should so suffer? Who or what is the better for my suffering? Who benefits? God, man, myself? Of course they don't.' Such are the indignant questions that formulate themselves in the mind of the sufferer.

For pain emphatically does *not* as a general rule improve the character. In small doses it makes men irritable, exacting, self-centred. Continued over a long period it gradually breaks down the best of characters, turning a cheerful, good-natured, generous-spirited man into a querulous egotist whose interests contract to the confines of his suffering body, whose horizon is shut in by the anticipation of the next recurring spasm. I have seen these things happen and have witnessed the deterioration which pain has engendered in the characters of agreeable women and strongly disciplined men; I have seen these things not once but many times.

#### *Why Physical Pain is Belittled.*

The attitude which belittles physical pain and deems it inferior as an evil to mental pain is, I believe, due to two causes. The attitude is, in the first place, the result of sentiment, a by-product of the widespread desire to think that the body is unimportant and the soul important. In fulfilment of this desire men seek to belittle the body by insisting that nothing which can happen to it is as important as that which can happen in and to the soul. Secondly, it is euphemistic, an expression of the

natural human tendency to speak the dreadful thing fair in order that, being flattered, it may relent and show itself to be not so very dreadful after all. Thus the Greeks called the Black Sea the 'sea friendly to strangers', precisely because it was stormy and dangerous, hoping thereby to buy off its anger. A similar feeling inspires the British soldier's deliberate belittlement of the frightfulness of war, so that the stark horror of the instruments of death and destruction is softened by such appellations as that of 'cocktail' and 'breadbasket'.

But that in spite of their euphemisms, ordinary people do in fact regard physical pain as evil, as, indeed, the greatest of all evils, is shown by their behaviour when subjected to it. For the nature and degree of the evil of pain must be judged not when we are immune from it, but when we are experiencing it. Now it is the case, as I have pointed out, that 99 out of every 100 people do in the end 'speak' under torture, thereby indicating that they are prepared to endure any degree of some other evil, dishonour, shame, the betrayal of friends, even the loss of life itself, as preferable to the continuance of this particular evil; and if anybody doubts whether this is so, I challenge him to put the question to the test by allowing himself to be tied naked to a post and then stimulated in carefully chosen parts and at carefully chosen intervals by a red hot poker. If he is not rapidly found to be willing to undergo any and every kind of mental pain provided that the treatment is stopped, I shall be delighted to confess my error and to abandon my conviction. Meanwhile, it will remain my conviction which nothing short of so drastic a demonstration can shake.

Before leaving the subject, I take leave to note that those theologians whose works I most respect, and in particular Friedrich von Hügel, have always set their faces against the view that physical pain is not a true evil. They would not maintain, as I am doing, that it is as great an evil as mental pain or is greater even than that, but they have no sympathy with the sentimental cant which, in order to maintain that the facts are other than they are and the universe in which they occur other than it is, shuts men's eyes to the implications of the plainest facts of their own experience.

(3) *The Suggestion that Evil is not Positive but Negative, Being the Deprivation of, or Opposite of Good.*

Another method of dealing with the problem of evil is to assert that evil is not a positive factor in the universe, but is negative; not so much a fact, as the lack of a fact. To be precise, evil is that which ought to be avoided, or, alternatively, it is the absence or deprivation of good; or, again, it is the necessary opposite of good, evil being on this view related to good as the outside of a basin is related to its inside. For just as you cannot have an inside without having an outside, so, it is argued, you cannot have good without also having evil. Good, therefore, must bring evil into existence by the law of its own nature. I will consider these suggestions separately.

(a) *That Evil is what ought to be Avoided.*

There is, first, the suggestion that evil is what ought to be avoided. In opposition to this suggestion I should maintain that the notion of 'evil' is far wider than what we ought to try to avoid. We can only try to avoid the things we know. But there is no reason to suppose that there are not many evils of which human beings have and can have no knowledge. Such evils would still be evils although human beings had no knowledge of and human conduct bore no reference to them.

(b) *That Evil is the Deprivation of Good.*

I turn to the definition of evil which equates it with the 'deprivation' or the 'absence' or the 'limitation' of good.

On this view, whatever is, is good. Starting from this assumption philosophers have endeavoured to prove that the world is all good. Spinoza, for example, says 'by reality and perfection I mean the same thing'. Now this view, in so far as it asserts that evil consists not in the existence of something which is bad, but only in the non-existence of something which is good, equates the meaning of the term evil with 'something else, namely, the absence or limitation of what is good. To all such definitions of evil there is, I suggest, one general objection. The objection is as follows. Let us suppose that somebody

defines evil in terms of something else, as, for example, the deprivation or absence of good; and let us use the expression X to denote any one of these "somethings" in terms of which evil is defined. The position that we are considering is, then, that of somebody who affirms that evil is X. Now when such a proposition is asserted we consider the proposition and either assent or dissent. Our assent or dissent is determined by a consideration of what we know both about X and about evil, and, when we are considering them, we think of them as two different things. Let us contrast this with a case of true definition in which there are involved not two things, but two accounts of the same thing. If a person says that a quadrilateral is a figure with four sides, we do not consider what we know about quadrilaterals and then agree or disagree. We accept the definition at once, knowing that it gives us information not about quadrilaterals, but merely about the way in which the *word* quadrilateral is used. A true definition in fact is always of words, and is the sort of thing one finds in a dictionary. But when we are told that evil is X, we realize that what is being communicated is not merely a dictionary definition but an important philosophical generalization about the nature of things. Let us suppose that there is an expression X, such that the meaning of evil and the meaning of X are in all respects identical, so that there was no case to which the one meaning applied, to which the other did not also and equally apply. If this were so, we should feel that we had hit upon an important truth, and it would seem to us to be an important truth just because we should already have a definite (though unanalysable) meaning for the word 'evil' in our mind which we could compare with the known meaning of X and—granted that it *was* a truth that we had hit on—recognize to be identical with it. But at this point a difficulty arises. If the meanings of X and evil were *really* the same, how could we have compared them? One does not, after all, compare the meaning of X with the meaning of X, or the meaning of evil with the meaning of evil. The inference would seem to be that the two meanings, that of X and of evil, never were in all respects the same, although they may be so in many respects; for example, one might be an example or a particular case of the other, as when X is a sin and we say that X is evil. It follows that when we

say that X is evil, we are neither merely making a statement about philology to the effect that the two words are being used grammatically in the same sense, nor are we saying that their meanings are in all respects identical. What we are in fact doing, assuming that there is a sense in which the proposition 'X is evil' is true, is to cite something, in this case X, which happens to be evil. Hence the proposition 'X is evil' is true in an illustrative sense only, and it is true only in this illustrative sense—the sense in which X is an example or illustration of evil—for the reason that there is in fact *no* expression X whose meaning is *identical* with the meaning of the word evil.

It follows that statements like 'evil is disobedience to the will of God', or 'evil is absence of good', are neither dictionary definitions, like the definition of a quadrilateral, nor are they assertions of identity of meaning; they are affirmations about the things that are evil. This, indeed, seems in any event probable from the number of different and incompatible definitions of evil that have in fact been suggested. There have never been two *incompatible* definitions of the word 'quadrilateral'.

Before leaving this point it will be convenient to put its conclusion in a logical form. Let us suppose that evil is equated with something else, e.g., opposition to God's will, or deprivation of good. We then have this proposition, 'Evil is disobedience to God's will or is deprivation of good'. Now this is a meaningful proposition in the sense that I can consider it and discuss it with a view to determining whether it is true. I am in fact engaged in discussing it at the moment.

Now let us suppose that it is true. For the word 'evil', then, I can read the expression 'disobedience to God's will', or, alternatively, 'deprivation of good', without alteration of meaning, wherever the word 'evil' occurs. I propose to make this substitution in the proposition to which I have just referred, the proposition, namely, which asserts that 'evil is disobedience to God's will or is deprivation of good'. When the substitution is made, the proposition runs 'disobedience to God's will is disobedience to God's will', or, alternatively, 'deprivation of good is deprivation of good'. Now, unlike the first proposition which was discussible, these two propositions are not discussible. They are in fact meaningless tautologies and we cannot, therefore, consider

in regard to them whether they are true or not. But the first proposition *was* meaningful and discussible.

It follows that the first proposition does not mean the same as, and cannot be equated with, either the second or the third. Now we obtained the second and third by assuming that the meaning of 'evil' being the same as, could be replaced without change of sense by some other expression such as 'disobedience to God's will' or 'deprivation of good'. Since the results of proceeding on this assumption have led to the substitution for a meaningful proposition of a meaningless one, it follows that the assumption was false, and that the meaning of evil is not the same either as that of the expression 'disobedience to God's will', or of the expression 'deprivation of good' or, it may be added—for the argument is universal in its application—of any alternative form of expression. I conclude that evil is a unique, unanalysable, indefinable conception which cannot be equated with anything else. Pain, sin, deprivation of good, disobedience to God's will, may well be instances of the things that are evil, but they are no more to be equated with evil than this particular shade of red which is an example of 'redness' can be equated with the concept 'redness' which it illustrates.

(c) *That Evil is the Necessary Opposite of Good and both Entails and is Entailed by it.*

I turn now to the suggestion that good and evil are opposite, in the sense that the presence of one necessarily entails that of the other, as the inside of a basin entails the outside. There are two observations I should like to make in regard to this suggestion. The first is that it begs the question by assuming that all pairs of opposites are of the same class, and then assigning the pair, good and evil, to that class. The class is that of logical opposites. These are such that the presence of one of them necessarily entails that of the other, as, for example, in the cases of outside and inside, or of concave and convex. But there are other pairs which are not of this kind, for example, wet and dry. If everything that existed were sea, there would be no dry. Similarly with hot and cold. If the sun monopolized the physical universe, there would be no cold. Now I cannot see any *necessary* reason why the universe should not consist entirely of sea or

entirely of sun. If either of these cases were realized one of a pair of opposites would exist without the other. Now if good and evil belong to the first class of opposites, then the presence of good necessarily entails that of evil, but it is a mere assumption that they do, and in making the assumption we beg the question at issue. We are in fact arguing somewhat as follows: 'Because good necessarily entails evil, therefore they are logical opposites and belong to the first class of opposites; pairs of opposites in the first class necessarily entail one another; therefore good necessarily entails evil.'

*That Good which is Conceived as the Opposite of Evil is Necessarily Infected by Evil.*

My second observation may most conveniently be introduced by a question. If evil, being good's necessary opposite, is logically dependent upon good and good upon evil, can good be regarded as wholly and completely good? Would not good, in fact, be better if it did not entail the existence of this disreputable associate? In Plato's dialogue, the *Philebus*, Socrates develops a famous argument in regard to the nature of pleasure. Two kinds of pleasure are distinguished, pure and impure. Pure pleasures are distinguished from impure pleasures by virtue of the fact that they contain no admixture of pain. Many pleasures, Socrates points out, are dependent for their pleasantness upon the degree of preceding dissatisfaction to which they are relative. Thus the pleasure of the convalescent is dependent upon the fact of his preceding illness; of the resting man upon his preceding fatigue; of the water-drinking man upon his preceding thirst. These states and activities, convalescing, resting, water-drinking, are characterized by the sort of pleasure whose nature, when it is experienced in its crudest form, as, for example, in the form of relief from long and wearying pain, we all recognize for what it is. We recognize, that is to say, that the pleasure experienced on relief from pain owes its pleasantness solely to the fact that we are no longer suffering the pain which we formerly suffered. These, then, are impure pleasures. There are, however, other pleasures which, Plato points out, are not dependent upon want or need. The smell of violets and the taste of chocolate are humble examples of these.



least how the existence of real evil in the universe is compatible with its creation by a benevolent and omnipotent being. It suggests that God first made the human mind of such a kind that it cannot recognize good when it sees it, if it sees good alone; and then found Himself under the necessity of adding evil to qualify and oppose this good in order that, by distinguishing it from evil, man might learn to recognize it as good. But if this is in fact the explanation of evil, what are we to say of the universe and its artificer? What a bungling, short-sighted job God made of His work and why, if God is indeed its creator, should He have gone out of His way so to constitute the human mind that it was unable to recognize good without having at the same time and as a condition of its recognition to know evil? Why did not God make us from the first, why does He not remake us now, so that we can recognize good as good without having to distinguish it from evil? If He were so to remake us, He would be able to abolish evil and that, surely, would be a good?

*Summary of the Objections to the View that Evil is the Necessary Opposite of Good.*

This reflection suggests a general observation on the type of argument which seeks to establish the necessity of evil in the universe as a condition either of good or of the recognition of good. Let us suppose for a moment that the conclusion of this type of argument is accepted. How can we reconcile our acceptance with the view that the universe was constructed in the best possible way by a being who is both omnipotent and benevolent? I have already dwelt on this difficulty in the second chapter in connection with the argument from human free will and I do not wish to restate it here. It is sufficient to draw attention to its peculiar relevance to the considerations just advanced. This, we are asked to believe, is the best of all possible universes, since God made it. We are also asked to believe that this is a universe which is such that good can only exist if evil also exists, or can only be recognized as good provided that evil is there to point the contrast. It is difficult to see how these two beliefs are to be made compatible.

In the beginning of H. G. Wells's modern parable *All Aboard for Ararat* the Lord God explains how embarrassed He was to

find that, when He had created light, He had provided Himself with a shadow. That shadow is thereafter inseparable from God and comes to be represented as a permanent stain upon the brightness of God's universe, a stain from which there subsequently springs Satan, sin and suffering. This highly ingenious simile illustrates in a picturesque way the view of evil as a necessary complement of good. Evil, we are told, is as necessary to good as is his shadow to a man. But what it does not do is to explain how a God who was omniscient did not foresee the generation of the shadow, or how a God who was omnipotent and wanted to be rid of it, nevertheless let it remain.

The following quotation is from a mid nineteenth-century theological writer, who after dilating upon the difficulties which I have so briefly summarized, reaches the following unashamed dualist conclusion. 'The idea that death and disease, wrong and suffering, are essential to Divine purposes; that life cannot be unfolded except under a frightful pressure of mental, moral and physical evil; that afflicted bodies and distorted minds and souls tormented in a very hell of anguish and misery are things absolutely necessary to the grand upward procession of life, is neither more nor less than a diabolical delusion. It has been born of these very things, and it has been infinitely pernicious in obscuring and darkening the wholly benignant character of the Creator.'

## II. WHAT FOLLOWS FROM THE ACCEPTANCE OF EVIL AS REAL AND OBJECTIVE: THE DUALIST HYPOTHESIS

For the foregoing reasons I have always found myself unconvinced by the various attempts to mitigate the stark fact of evil, either by representing it as not wholly evil, as not, that is to say, what it seems to be, or by accepting it as evil but showing it to be a necessary correlate of good. The first kind of explanation seemed to me to falsify the facts of experience, the second to be incompatible with the religious hypothesis in its usual form. The first explained evil by explaining it away; the second explained away good as well as evil. What followed? That the religious hypothesis, if it were to be accepted at all, must be accepted not in its usual form, but in a form which has always been regarded

as a heresy. This consists in accepting good and evil as two equal and independent principles, the expression of two equally real and conceivably equally powerful antagonists, God who is good but limited, and God's adversary who is evil, between whom a perpetual battle is fought in the hearts of men for the governance of the world. This, broadly, was the view of the Zoroastrians and also of the heretical Christian sect of the Manichees. The two doctrines, that of Zoroastrianism and that of Manichaeism, while each affirming the independent reality of evil, take different views of its origin. According to Zoroastrianism, the evil principle in the universe was created by God and *became* corrupt. According to the teaching of Mani, the two principles, that of good and evil, are eternal and independently existent. God, the good principle, is equated with light; the Archon, the evil principle, is equated with darkness and matter. To account for the evil which is in man, Mani suggested the following myth as a substitute for the doctrine of the Fall. The Archon attacked the powers of light and made prisoner the Ray of Light who is also the Ideal Man. God counter-attacked, rescued the greater and better part of the Ray of Light, but left the weaker part in captivity to the 'Dark powers'. From this weaker part, the 'Dark powers' made mortal men. Thus man was originally formed in the image of Satan, but contained within him a spark of the heavenly light, which awaits its final deliverance by separation from the enveloping darkness.

The conception of the independent reality of evil has always been frowned upon by orthodox Christians, yet if the conclusions of the foregoing arguments are sound, it would seem more nearly to accord with the facts of experience, as we know them, than any of the other hypotheses which invoke a supernatural principle to explain the workings of the natural world. What can be urged against it? The many objections which have historically been brought have been conveniently summarized by Mr. C. S. Lewis<sup>1</sup> under two heads, a metaphysical and a moral.

*Objections to Dualism. (i) The Metaphysical Argument, that the Two Forces do not Explain Each Other.*

The metaphysical objection is as follows. The two powers—Ormuzd and Ahriman—Mr. Lewis is using the Zoroastrian

<sup>1</sup> See article in the *Spectator* dated 7th February, 1941.

terminology—do not explain each other. Since they are equal and together neither, he insists, can claim to be ultimate. More ultimate than either is the fact that they *are* together. For neither of them, as Mr. Lewis puts it, 'chose this *tête-à-tête*'. He concludes that dualism does not go to the heart of the matter. Its two confronting ultimates are not real ultimates; more ultimate than either is the situation which produced and confronts them one with the other. 'On the level of picture-thinking this difficulty', says Mr. Lewis, 'is symbolized by our inability to think of Ormuzd and Ahriman without smuggling in the idea of a common *space* in which they can be together.' I am not clear whether it is or is not a satisfactory answer to this argument to put the simple question, 'Why should the two deities explain each other? Why, indeed, should they be explained or even explicable?' For let us explore the implications of Mr. Lewis's assertion. Whatever be our conception of the universe we must, it is obvious, start somehow; we must begin with something; and the something with which we begin, from the very fact that we do begin with it, must itself be without explanation, since, if something else were invoked to explain it, then the 'something else' must needs be logically prior to that which it is invoked to explain. Thus the 'something' being explained by a logically prior 'something else' could not have been ultimate.

The force of this consideration is adequately recognized by those who adopt the orthodox religious view. Postulating God as a First Cause, the ultimate ground from which all else derives, they rightly point out that the demand for a *cause of the cause*, an *explanation of the ground*, is illegitimate; illegitimate, because, if we were to admit it, we should then be entitled to demand a cause of the cause of the cause, an explanation of the explanation of the ground, and so on indefinitely. 'We must stop, or rather start somewhere,' they say, 'and so we propose to start with a single all-embracing ground from which all else springs; and that is an all-powerful, all-wise, all-good God. And this ground, just because it cannot be explained by anything prior to it, must be self-explanatory.' We are thus committed by the orthodox religious hypothesis to postulating from the beginning a self-explanatory ground, that is to say, an unexplained ground. We just accept God as the initially given fact, and tacitly agree not

to ask how He arises, who or what produced Him, or by what He is to be explained; we accept Him, then, without explanation.

But if we are entitled to accept a 'one' without explanation, why not a 'two'? Admittedly the two are irrational, or rather, as Mr. Lewis puts it, the fact of there being two coequals is irrational, but so, as far as I can see, and in precisely the same sense, is the 'one', or the fact of there being one. Granted that the initial ground of things remains unexplained, that the beginning must be irrational in the sense that it is beyond the power of reason to explain it, or even to conceive how an explanation of it could be possible, granted that the demand for an explanation is, therefore, illegitimate, why is an unexplained 'two' a greater affront to the reason than an unexplained 'one'? There is no mystical uniqueness about the number one; it is just a number like any other. There is no necessary reason that I can see why the universe should proceed from or be explicable in terms of one ultimate rather than of two, or of forty-nine, or of  $\pi$  or of the square root of minus one. Granted, in short, that we do not know and cannot know how the universe could have begun, we may as well admit that it might just as well have begun as two as begun as one.

*Objections to Dualism: (ii) The Moral Argument, that it Misconceives the Nature of Evil.*

I give the moral argument against dualism in Mr. Lewis's own words:

'The moral difficulty is that Dualism gives evil a positive, substantive, self-consistent nature, like that of good. If this were true, if Ahriman existed in his own right no less than Ormuzd, what could we mean by calling Ormuzd good except that we happened to prefer him? Those who serve Ahriman happen to prefer *him*. In what sense can the one party be said to be right and the other wrong? If evil has the same kind of reality as good, the same autonomy and completeness, our allegiance to good becomes the arbitrarily chosen loyalty of a partisan. A sound theory of value demands something very different. It demands that good should be original and evil a mere perversion; that good should be the tree and evil the ivy; that good should be able to see all round

evil (as when sane men understand lunacy) while evil cannot retaliate in kind; that good should be able to exist on its own while evil requires the good on which it is parasitic in order to continue its parasitic existence. . . . Good and evil, then, are not on all fours. Badness is not even bad *in the same way* in which goodness is good. Ormuzd and Ahriman cannot be equals. In the long run, Ormuzd must be original and Ahriman derivative. The first hazy idea of *devil* must, if we begin to think, be analysed into the more precise ideas of "fallen" and "rebel" angel.'

There are two separate affirmations here: (a) evil is not positive as good is positive, for we do not desire evil for its own sake and do desire good for its own sake. Therefore, we cannot treat the two principles as being on all fours. (b) If there were no prior fact of good, prior, that is to say, to the evil which good condemns, we should have no standard by reference to which to recognize, and by appeal to which to condemn, evil. In the absence of such a standard good would be that which those who happen to like that sort of thing happen to like, and evil that which is preferred by those whose tastes happen to be different.

(a) *The Argument that since Evil is a Perversion of or a Parasite upon Good, Evil is not Ultimately and Independently Real.*

I agree that evil is parasitic upon good and that it is so in a double sense. First, nobody does what is evil for its own sake. He only does evil as a means to something else which he takes to be good. Thus if we lie, we lie to gain a purpose, but when we tell the truth we do so for its own sake. Hence, other things being equal, we tell the truth. If we cheat or betray, we do so to gain an end, but we play fair and keep faith for no end simply because, in the absence of inducements to the contrary, we realize that to play fair and keep faith is the natural thing to do. Admittedly, other things rarely are equal; admittedly, 'inducements to the contrary' are usually present; admittedly, therefore, we do frequently lie, cheat and betray. The fact nevertheless remains that we do require an incentive to do these things beyond the actual doing of them. But the doing of good is its own incentive. Evil, then, is never an end in itself; it is always a means to an end beyond itself. Good is an end in itself.

*That Evil is Parasitic on Good.*

Secondly, it is only because and in so far as most people habitually do good that it pays anybody to do evil. Take lying, for example. The object of a lie is to deceive. In order to achieve its object it must gain credence. Now if everybody habitually lied, nobody would believe anybody else, and lying, therefore, would lose its point, since it would not gain credence and would not, therefore, deceive. It is the practice of truth-telling by most people most of the time which makes lying profitable for the few. Similarly with theft. If everybody habitually stole from everybody else, nobody would trust his neighbour and theft would become immeasurably more difficult, apart from the fact that if we were all burglars there would be no goods to steal. It is only because most of us are in the main honest and trust in our neighbours' honesty that precautions are sufficiently relaxed to make stealing possible and profitable to those who are not honest.

So, too, in the playing of games. If most of us were cheats, all of us would be vigilantly on our guard against being cheated, with the result that cheating would become extremely and unrepayingly difficult. What makes cheating profitable is the prevalence of non-cheating, just as what makes lying profitable is the prevalence of truth-telling, and stealing, the prevalence of honest men.

Two conclusions follow. First, nobody does evil for the sake of evil; he does it for the sake of some end which he takes to be good which, he believes, will be achieved through doing the evil. Evil, then, is always desired as a means to something else which is, whether rightly or wrongly, thought to be good.

Secondly, evil is parasitic upon good, in the sense that it is only because most men are virtuous in most of their dealings that it pays some men to be vicious. What follows? What, I take it, Mr. Lewis *supposes* to follow is that evil is not wholly and independently real. But does this in fact follow? I suggest that it does not. All, I think, that *does* follow is that, since evil is not desired for itself, but is only desired as a means to something which is assumed not to be evil, evil is, as Mr. Lewis says, parasitic upon good. It follows, too, that, since, on the religious view, good is fundamental, and since, if that view is true, there must always be

good in the universe, then if there is also evil—and, of course, there need not be; there can be oak trees without mistletoe, hosts without their parasites—the evil must be good's parasite. Quite so; but though evil is desired as a means to an end, it is nevertheless desired, and though a parasite is dependent upon its host it none the less exists and is real. Similarly with the view which would define evil as that which men seek to avoid. To hold that evil is what men seek to avoid is not to hold that it is unreal. If evil were a real and positive thing, then that men should seek to avoid it is precisely what one would expect; part, though not the whole, of what I mean by evil is indeed precisely conveyed by this notion of something that I ought to avoid. To say, then, that evil is something that one ought to avoid is to say something that is true about evil, but is not to define evil, just as to say that evil is parasitic upon good is to say something that is true about evil but is not to define it. That evil is the correlative of good, that it is the deprivation of good, that it is what ought to be or what is avoided, that it is parasitic upon good—all these things are true of evil, but they are not what we mean by evil. They are not, that is to say, identical with the essence of evil. In fact, as I have argued above,<sup>1</sup> evil cannot without loss of meaning be equated with anything other than itself.

(b) *The Argument that if Evil were real and Objective, there would be no Standard by Reference to which to Judge and Condemn it.*

The second part of Mr. Lewis's moral argument is to the effect that unless good is in some sense prior to and more ultimate than evil, we should have no standard by reference to which we could recognize good as good and evil as evil, and good would be simply that which we happen to prefer.

'If Ahriman existed in his own right no less than Ormuzd, what could we mean by calling Ormuzd good except that we happened to prefer him?'

I am not sure that I understand this argument. I take it to mean that, unless men recognized good to begin with as an absolute, they would have no standard by reference to which to condemn evil. Possibly; but could not the same consideration be applied to evil? Applied to evil it reads as follows: Unless men

<sup>1</sup> See argument on pp. 83-91.



recognized evil to begin with as an absolute, they would have no standard by reference to which to approve good as good or to condemn evil as evil. Evil, then, would, on this view, be just the name we give to what we happen to dislike; other people might dislike something different and then *that* would for them be evil.

I do not wish to use this argument myself, since I do not agree with the subjective theory of good and evil which it implies. I have criticized this theory elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> My purpose is merely to point out that any argument which seeks to establish the existence and objectivity of good as a principle which is independent of my likes, must also tend to establish the objectivity of evil as a principle which is independent of my dislikes.

'The master', says Mr. Lewis, illustrating his view, 'can correct a boy's sums because they are blunders in arithmetic—in the same arithmetic which he also does and does better. If they were not even attempts at arithmetic—if they were not in the arithmetical world at all—they could not be arithmetical mistakes.'

The argument here is that mistakes in arithmetic cannot arise unless there is a 'world of arithmetic'. But what is entailed by a 'world of arithmetic'? That there should be numbers between which there hold certain fixed relations. Now the relations, being fixed, are real. Therefore the blunder which consists in saying that they are not what they in fact are is a real blunder. The fact that the relation between  $4 \times 2$  and  $4 + 4$  is *not* one of inequality is as real as the fact that it *is* one of equality. Hence the mathematician who said that it *was* one of inequality would be committing a real mistake. The existence of 'an arithmetical world' entails, therefore, wrongness, no less than it entails rightness.

I conclude that attempts which are made on Mr. Lewis's lines to show that evil is not a real and fundamental principle belonging to the nature of things are unsuccessful.

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*, Chapter XI. A brief statement of the criticism also appears in Chapter VI, pp. 199-207 of this book.

## INCURSION INTO PHILOSOPHY

*The Difficulties of Monism and the Logical Arguments for Dualism.*

At this point it will be convenient to introduce certain positive considerations which I have hitherto believed to tell strongly against the view that the universe is a unity. (I still believe that *they tell strongly* against it, but, as the second part of this book will show, I no longer have my old assurance that they are conclusive.) The considerations take the form of a number of criticisms of the philosophical doctrine of Monism, which maintains that everything is ultimately a unity or One, and that the many things of which the universe *appears* to be composed are not *really* many, since they are all emanations from or aspects of or manifestations of the unity or One. It follows, if this view is true, that the appearance of multiplicity in the universe is *only* an appearance, the universe being in fact a unity. The theological view which asserts that ultimately there is only one God, or that initially there was only one God and that the universe which we know is a creation of, or emanation from, or a manifestation of this one God, constitutes a special case of philosophical monism.

The discussion that ensues turns inevitably on philosophical issues and does not, I am afraid, wholly avoid the introduction of technical arguments. It is, therefore, on a somewhat different level from the rest of the book, and those who are temperamentally averse from philosophy are advised to omit it.

The considerations which I wish to adduce against monism may be divided under two heads.

*Arguments against Monism: (i) The Logical Difficulty.*

First, there is a logical difficulty. This is a generalized version of the argument already used in the discussion of pain and evil.<sup>1</sup> Some philosophers are pluralists; they believe, that is to say, that the universe consists of, or contains a number of irreducibly different things. By saying that the differences between these things are irreducible, they mean that these differences cannot be resolved or explained away as being the appearances, the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II pp. 40, 41

ultimately illusory appearances, of an underlying unity. Dualism, which maintains that the universe contains at least two irreducibly different principles, is therefore a special case of pluralism. Now if the universe is in fact a unity, the beliefs of pluralists are false. It is, that is to say, an error to suppose that the universe consists of many different things. Is this error which the pluralists make real or illusory? If it is illusory, it is not *really* a mistake to think that the universe consists of many different things, and the universe accordingly consists of many different things. If it is a *real* error, it must be real in precisely the same sense as that in which—if the universe is in fact a unity—the appearance of many-ness is an illusion, is, that is to say, unreal. It is real, therefore, in the sense of being a fundamental feature of the nature of things, and not an error due to our partial understandings. Now if error is a real factor in the universe and the universe is a unity, the universe must be a unity of error. I do not know whether there is any logical objection to this view, but so far as I am aware, no monist has ever maintained it. Moreover, it is incompatible with the view that the universe is or has the sort of unity which belongs to an all-good person. The conclusion would seem to be that, since the view that the universe is a unity shows it to contain real error, the universe cannot be wholly a unity.

*Arguments against Monism: (ii) The Metaphysical Difficulty.*

The metaphysical argument is not easy to state shortly and without introducing technicalities. Let us provisionally assume that there is one universal ground from which all things proceed. The word 'ground', as here used, denotes a logical conception. An example of a ground would be a set of premises; where a set of premises entailed a conclusion, we should say that the premises were the ground for that conclusion. Thus that a figure is a triangle is a ground for the conclusion that its three interior angles are equal to two right angles; that a thing is red is a ground for the conclusion that it has a surface. It is a connection of this kind, that is to say, a necessary connection, that metaphysicians have had in mind when they have said that the universe is fundamentally a unity, and that this unity is the ground for all the variety and multiplicity which it apparently

develops. On this view, then, variety and multiplicity are appearances of a more fundamental unity, appearances in which the unity expresses or manifests itself.

*Spinoza's Monism.*

I take as an example of this conception the monistic system of Spinoza, who is a pre-eminent exponent of the view that the universe is a ground in the sense just described, of which whatever exists is an expression or manifestation or development. To this universal ground Spinoza gave the name of Substance or God. Now God, Spinoza maintained, has a number of attributes. In point of fact, since God is infinite, the number of his attributes is also infinite. Of these, however, only two are known to us, thought and extension or occupancy of space. These two attributes of God were deduced by Spinoza from the fact that the world which we know contains both extended-substance, that is to say, matter, and thought-substance or mind, and since God, the universal ground, is all that exists, God must possess as attributes whatever we observe to exist in the world that we know. The pieces of matter that we see in the world are, then, aspects of God; more precisely, they are expressions, or as Spinoza calls them, modes of God's attributes. Spinoza's system serves to illustrate a monistic philosophy which is also a monistic theology. It is logical, extreme, and uncompromising and contrives, therefore, as it seems to me, to exhibit in the clearest possible way the difficulties to which any monistic metaphysical system is exposed. Let us see what these difficulties are.

*Criticism of Spinoza's Monism.*

God, as we have seen, has two known attributes, one that expresses itself in the mode of extension, the other in the mode of thinking. If the two attributes are parts of God, God is obviously not a unity but a duality, one part of Him being thought and the other part extension. But, it will be said, attributes are not parts. After what model, then, are we to conceive them? A possible answer may be conveyed by means of an illustration. Hardness is an attribute of the top of the table; so is blackness. But hardness is not blackness. Thus the black shape that I see is not hard, the hard something that I feel is not black. If God, then, has

different attributes in the sense in which attributes belong to physical things, there must be a difference between His nature as expressed in one attribute and His nature as expressed in another.

To this it may be replied that it is not in the light of physical attributes that we must think of the attributes of God, but after the model of the attributes or—to use a more appropriate word—the expressions of a mind or spirit. It is, as it happens, a little difficult for us to accept this modification in Spinoza's case, since Spinoza explicitly tells us that one of God's attributes is in fact physical—at any rate it is conceived after the model of physical things—but as we are not engaged in a criticism of Spinoza's philosophy, but merely citing it as an illustration of monistic metaphysics in general, this particular difficulty may be waived.

Let us, then, think of the modes of God's attributes after the model of the expressions of a personality. Thus I am, we will suppose, at the same time, listening to music and eating my dinner; or I am at the same time reading and knitting. Now here, admittedly, we are approaching more closely to the conception of an underlying unity which expresses itself in diverse modes, while at the same time remaining a unity. Yet even here difference manages to creep in. It cannot be said that *all* of me is at the same time engaged both in listening and in enjoying the taste of food, both in reading and knitting; for the same thing cannot at the same time in respect of the same part of itself be engaged in doing two different things, or in having two different experiences, or in being two different things. Most people would express their recognition of the fact that it cannot be by saying that I have two different senses, the sense of hearing and the sense of tasting, which provide me with two different sets of sensations. But though the two different sensations are both mine in the sense of being experienced and experienced simultaneously by me, it is very doubtful whether I can consciously attend to both of them at the same time. Thus if I am listening intently to the music, I shall be comparatively oblivious of the food I am eating, and *vice versa*; in other words, one or the other set of sensations will at any given moment tend to monopolize my consciousness. Even if both sets of sensations are provided by the same sense, one will tend to oust

the other from consciousness; thus the pain of toothache, however violent, will be forgotten in the still more violent pain of a burn. Let us suppose, however, that it is possible for both sets of sensations to be present in and attended to by my consciousness at the same moment. Even on this assumption, that part of my consciousness which consists of or attends to the taste sensations will be different from that part of my consciousness which consists of or attends to the sound sensations. We cannot, then, truly say that my consciousness is *wholly* and simultaneously engaged both in enjoying the sensations of taste and in enjoying the sensations of sound, since one part or aspect of my consciousness, the listening part, will be differently engaged or will be enjoying different experiences from the tasting part. Thus the principle that the same thing cannot, in respect of the same part of itself, be wholly engaged in two different things or in experiencing two different things, is not infringed. If I may employ a metaphor which must not be pressed, since consciousness is not after all a physical thing, I should say that in the case cited a crack runs through my consciousness, distinguishing the listening aspect from the tasting. Now on whatever model we conceive the unity which expresses itself in multiplicity and whatever the analogy on which we conceive the nature of the expressions of the unity, I do not see how the intrusion of this crack is to be avoided.

*Difficulties in the Conception of Spinoza's God as the Universal Ground.*

To return to Spinoza's conception of God, He must be conceived as possessing from the beginning the capacity to express Himself in the modes of thought and of extension. The difference between God's thinking attribute and His extended attribute is, therefore, potential in God from the first. That aspect of God which expresses itself in the mode of thinking is not, then, the same as that which expresses itself in the mode of extension. When the act of 'expressing' took place—assuming that is to say, as we must do if we believe in creation, that there was an event in time which was God's externalization or manifestation of Himself in the creation of the world—the potential difference which from the first was present in God became actual. Thus the differences which we perceive in the world as actual differ-

ences must be traced back to their source or origin in God in whom they were present in potentiality waiting to be developed in actuality. God, therefore, contains within Himself the source of or potentiality for all the differences which the world is seen to exhibit.

This leads to a further point. 'Many-ness', that is to say, the multiplicity of things that appear in the world, is not just 'many-ness' but is a particular kind of 'many-ness'; it is, that is to say, one particular collection of things out of a number of possible collections of things. Thus the number of pebbles on the beaches of England is a particular number; it is X not Y. The colour of the pebble which is now a yard away, proceeding in a due easterly direction from the central point of the third column starting from the shoreward end of the Palace pier at Brighton, is blue not grey; its diameter, one inch not two inches. The moon is 247,000 and not 248,000 miles away from the earth; gold is yellow, not pink; and so on. Hence it is not only the potentiality for difference which must have been present in the initial ground, but the potentiality for just that kind of difference which is actually found; or alternatively (for, if the preceding argument<sup>1</sup> is valid, it makes no difference whether we say that the difference which is actually discerned is only an appearance of difference or is a real difference), just that kind of difference which actually *appears* to be found. An analogy may serve to illustrate the conclusion I am seeking to demonstrate.

Here is a piece of bare board which is, to all intents and purposes, featureless. No doubt it contains grain and is differentiated by knots, but these do not appear on the surface because it has been varnished. Let us suppose that the board is subjected to strain. Presently cracks will appear, points of weakness will become apparent; possibly the board may split. Now if the strain has been uniformly applied, the fact that the crack appears here and not there, that the weakness is shown in this place and not that, that the split is, let us say, horizontal and not vertical bears witness to characteristics initially present though unobserved in the board itself. For there must have been *some* reason why it cracked here and not there, split in one direction and not in another, and that reason must be grounded in the

<sup>1</sup> See p. 100.

nature of the board. Similarly, when a piece of glass splinters, it does so at one point rather than another, and we say that there must have been a flaw in the glass at this point to begin with. The conclusion that I am endeavouring to convey is that there must be *some* reason why the particular clefts of difference in the world—the differences, let us say, between the animal phyla—lead in this direction rather than in that, and this reason must have been present in the initial nature of things whatever that may have been, just as the potentiality for cracking here and not there, or for flawing at this point and not at that, was present in the initial nature of the board or the piece of glass. Now if the initial nature of things is the mind of a single person, that mind must be supposed to have contained initially all the differences which were subsequently developed in the world that proceeded from the mind. The mind was not, then, a complete unity since that part of it which—to revert for a moment to Spinoza's formula—expressed itself in the mode of extension, must have been theoretically distinguishable from the first from that part of it which expressed itself in the mode of thought. I am arguing, then, against the view that the apparent differences and 'many-nesses' which appear in the world can be adequately explained on the assumption that the world *has developed from* or *is the expression of* or in reality *is* a single unity. I am maintaining, in other words, that the 'many-ness' and the unique 'many-ness' which appears must be traceable back to flaws or faults (in the geological sense of the term) in the initial ground which were present in the ground from the first. I am maintaining further that the presence of these flaws or faults forbids us to regard the ground as a complete unity and convicts it of harbouring within itself, albeit in a disguised or potential form, the multiplicity that it subsequently develops, or, if the language be preferred, which subsequently appears.

This principle lies at the basis of a number of the conclusions which have been reached during the foregoing discussion. In the course of formulating objections to the religious hypothesis we encountered on a number of different occasions and in a number of different connections difficulties which seemed to militate against the possibility that the universe could be regarded as the creation or expression of a single mind or person.



The fact that these difficulties presented themselves from so many quarters and in so many connections is now seen not to have been fortuitous; for, granted that our present argument is valid, they spring from a fact inherent in the very nature of the cosmic situation.

*Arguments Against Monism: (iii) The 'Something Other' Difficulty.*

For all these difficulties, the difficulty of pain and evil, the difficulty of error, the difficulty of innate, bad desires, the difficulty of motive, the difficulty of the brute, obstructive principle, the difficulty of the medium which God's creativity requires in order to express itself—all these difficulties turn out to be different forms of the same difficulty which may be roughly termed the difficulty of the 'something other'. By the expression 'something other', I am endeavouring to convey that the existence of unity is not enough to account for the facts as we know them; something other than the unity must be postulated in order to explain the world's variety. Nor, so far as concerns this difficulty, does it affect the issue whether the 'something other' is conceived to be another principle outside the unity, opposed to it and dividing the universe with it, or whether it is the expression of a difference which springs up within the heart of the unity itself. For on the latter hypothesis no less than on the former, the universe turns out to be not a unity but a duality.

Let me give point to this conclusion by very briefly recapitulating some of the difficulties which illustrate it. There was the difficulty of pain and evil. How, I asked, if they were real, could they be engendered in a universe that was wholly good, engendered, that is to say, *out of* good? Was it not entailed that there was a flaw in the heart of good itself, which constituted the ground of the pain and evil that was subsequently made manifest *in* the good? Or, to put the point in another way, if the good must be qualified initially by the capacity to produce pain and evil, how could it be wholly good? Must it not be good qualified or flawed by something which was other than good? But if pain and evil were unreal, then the same question arose in regard to error. A universe of goodness and, therefore, presumably, of truth, must be flawed initially with the potentiality for generating untruth. Similarly in regard to the evil propensities or desires in

virtue of which man misuses his gift of free will to choose wrongly. How can we suppose that man came to possess these propensities and to be endowed with these desires except in so far as his Creator so created him? Now if his Creator were all good, He could not have so created him. Therefore, either the origin of evil is lodged in the heart of a single Creator, which is intolerable, or there is not one God, but two, a good God and an evil.

The difficulty of motive raised a similar point. If God changed as a result of the influence of some external agency, then that agency was outside God and, therefore, other than God; if as the result of some principle of change within Himself, if, that is to say, God contained the seeds of His own change, then there was from the beginning God plus the capacity for change into something other than God. Again, it was comparatively easy to understand not only why there should be pain and evil, but why God should wish to change or to cause change, if God was not omnipotent, but limited. One might suppose, for example, that He undertook the task of creation in order that He might overcome His limitation, just as one might suppose that pain and evil continued to exist in His despite *because* of His limitation. He desires, one might suppose, to eliminate them if He can, but there is something that opposes His desire and prevents the elimination. Thus there is at least one area of the universe in which God's writ does not run. In a word, if God is limited, then there is something other than God that limits and opposes Him.

The difficulty of motive leads to the difficulty of medium. Let us suppose that God creates like an artist out of the plenitude of His own nature which overflows through sheer excess of goodness. The universe, on this view, is the overflow or expression of God. But even so, something other than God is required for God to express Himself *in*; there is required, that is to say, a medium in which His creativity can take shape. Otherwise if we are to take the artist analogy seriously, there would be no work of Creation, there would be only God, just as, if there were no words or paint or stone or sound, there would be no work of art, but only the artist.

This last case constitutes the mildest version of the difficulty of the 'something other', of the difficulty, that is to say, which appears to entail the existence of something other than God, a

something (in this case) in *which* God can express Himself, in order to explain the facts of the universe, as we know it.

These are some of the many different forms in which what I have called the 'something other' difficulty expresses itself. If I am right, this difficulty arises from and reflects a fundamental feature of the universe which forbids us to describe the universe in terms of a single unity.

### *The Dualist Conclusion.*

What follows? What plainly follows is, I think, a dualism. There is good in the world and there is also evil. If a metaphysical principle is to be invoked to explain the good, an equivalent principle must be invoked to explain the evil; if, to put it theologically, there is God, there is also the Devil, or there is God plus a principle of inertia which obstructs Him.

This conclusion, I suggest, is the plain implication of the argument; and it was in this conclusion that, when I have concerned myself with theological questions during the last thirty years, my mind came to rest. It was the brick wall which obstructed any further advance towards the acceptance of the religious hypothesis. 'If', I said to myself in effect, 'it is to be admitted that anything can be legitimately surmised where so much has been dogmatically asserted, if we are to go beyond a simple agnosticism, then what must be surmised is that there are two Gods, a good one and a bad; or, since the notion of a bad God is revolting and not absolutely necessary, there must be a good God and an obstructive hampering principle in and through and in spite of which He seeks to work. This is what a plain reading of the facts seems to require. If, then, you are to entertain any religious belief at all, it must be a belief in Dualism.' And since Dualism is not an inspiring creed, since it prescribes neither a goal to endeavour, a spur to action nor a ground for self-discipline, I made shift in practice to manage as well as I could without any religious belief at all.

### *The Reopening of a Closed Question.*

Such, briefly, is the report of my religious pilgrimage, or rather, religious stagnation during the last thirty years. Why, then, bring the matter up again now? Have the arguments which

seemed unanswerable received an answer? I do not think that they have. Is there, perhaps, new evidence to bring into the old reckoning? I think that there is; or rather, there is not so much new evidence as a newly apprehended significance in the old. And, paradoxically, it is the fact of evil, or rather the new obtrusiveness of the fact which has orientated my mind anew and compelled, from the point of view of this new orientation, a fresh consideration of old issues. I dwelt in the first chapter on the topical relevance of evil, and drew attention to the frequency with which bad times have seemed to present afresh to the minds of those who endured them the time-honoured problems of religion. In my case, too, this familiar tendency has been at work and, as I have said, it is the fact of evil that has set it going. Evil, of course, there has always been; what is new in the modern world is, as I have pointed out, its obtrusiveness. Evil to-day so invades the consciousness that one cannot, with the best will in the world, ignore it and paradoxically it brings not so much a belief in God as the need to believe.

To believe that the universe is the creation of the traditional God of the religions, all wise, all good, and all powerful, and to believe this precisely *because* of the prevalence and obtrusiveness of the fact of evil—surely that is a paradox!

Logically it is. Logically, if I am to accept the conclusions of my own reasoning, I cannot but conclude that the fact of evil in the world is incompatible with its creation by a being at once all powerful and all good. I do not say that this conclusion is necessitated: many better philosophers than I have seen here no necessary incompatibility. Indeed, some have gone farther and found in the fact of evil not only not a disproof, but a positive proof of God's existence and creation of the world.

Thus the late W. R. Sorley maintained that the fact that evil is a problem to us, a problem which we must state and somehow try to solve, constitutes a consideration which disables us from denying God. For, he asks, why *should* evil be a problem? Why *should* it offend us, unless we assume the existence of an all-powerful and all-good being? We should have no right to object to it, nay more, it would never have occurred to us to object to it, except on the basis of the presumption that God exists and is good. Thus the existence of goodness and God is for him a logical

presupposition of our objection to evil; hence, though the problem of evil remains for us an insoluble problem, so far from discrediting theism, it entails it.

The fact that such arguments can be used, clearly disables me from asserting that the incompatibility upon which I have dwelt, the incompatibility between God and evil, is logically necessitated; but it does not alter my conclusion that, if the arguments I myself have used in this and the preceding chapter are valid, then the existence of a single all-good and all-embracing God and the fact of evil are two incompatible facts.

What, for the theist, follows? Either my arguments are faulty or the matters at issue go beyond logic. This, indeed, is the line which many God-believing and God-fearing men seem disposed to take. Nor can I avoid noticing that the most religious men are also the men who feel most deeply the evilness of evil and the acuteness of the problem which it raises. Thus von Hügel, without maintaining that evil necessitates God in a logical sense, lays stress upon the fact that our sensitiveness to evil develops *pari passu* with our belief in God. The more whole-hearted our belief in God, the deeper our repulsion from evil, the greater our compassion for suffering.

If I am right in maintaining that the obtrusiveness of evil in the modern world is in part responsible for a widespread tendency to turn towards God, even if the turning is evidence, as it is in my own case, of nothing more positive than a resolve to re-examine the grounds of the theistic hypothesis, then von Hügel might justifiably have claimed the tendency which our predicament has generated as an illustration of the correctness of his view.

For the simple truth is that one cannot help oneself. To be confronted with a universe which contains evil as an ultimate and ineradicable fact, to know that there is no defence against it save in the strength or rather in the weakness of one's own character, no hope of overcoming it save through the efficacy of one's own unaided efforts—*this* I find to be a position almost intolerably distressing. For one cannot help but know that one's character is *not* strong enough, one's efforts *not* efficacious, at least, that they are not, if unaided. For our burden in the world, as it has become, is indeed greater than we can bear, if we have nothing more secure to rely upon than the integrity of our own

puny reasons and the wavering uncertainty of our own ethical judgements. It follows that either one must supinely acquiesce in the evil one cannot resolve, or else. . . . There are two alternatives.

The first, since the world is evil, is to escape from it and to find, first in withdrawal, and, as an ultimate hope, in Nirvana, the true way of life. The second is to face evil and to seek to overcome it, even to take it up and absorb it into one's own life, transcending it and enlarging one's own personality with what one has transcended. The first is the way of the East, the second of Christianity. My temperament and disposition incline me to the second, but the second I know to be impossible unless I am assisted from without. By the grace of God we are assured, such assistance may be obtained and evil may be overcome; otherwise, there is no resource and no resistance.

Such, indeed, is the teaching of Pascal who, writing in a time similar to our own, uses the fact and intensity of evil to preach with the power of his incomparable eloquence the all-embracing goodness and ever present assistance of God, the infinite wretchedness of man and the immense gulf that lies between them, a gulf which no human effort can bridge, but which only the grace of God can span. But whereas the evils which made Pascal write, produced in him a conviction, in me and my contemporaries they have generated only a need. For whereas Pascal was convinced that God's assistance was available and could be obtained, we, who are forced to realize no less vividly than Pascal the weakness of man, are yet in doubt, as Pascal never was, as to whether assistance is available and by what means, if available, it can be obtained. For how, even if God exists, is his assistance to be invoked? And with that question I find myself on the threshold of Christianity and under obligation to reconsider the whole case which I had thought to have closed.

Briefly, then, the course of development which has resulted in the writing of this book is as follows. To the arguments contained in the preceding chapters, no answer with which I am acquainted has seemed to be satisfactory; no answer seems to me to be satisfactory now. For many years I was content to leave the matter there. Now I am content no longer. Is there, perhaps, a way not of answering but of outflanking these arguments? The rest of this book is an attempt to answer that question.

## Chapter 4

# SCIENCE AND THE COSMOS

### *The Deadlock and What Follows.*

I have told how the realization of the actuality of evil had in my case the effect of reopening the questions with which religion is concerned. It would not be true to say that it turned me to God, for the very existence of God must at this stage of the enquiry be held to be doubtful, but it set me anxiously in quest of Him. I have dwelt upon the paradox that the very fact which sharpens the need of God and provokes the search for Him apparently negates the possibility of His benevolence and omnipotence; for the conclusions of the intellect, I have urged, deny that the orthodox God of the religious hypothesis, omnipotent, benevolent, and omniscient, could have been the creator of the world, and deny it precisely because of the fact of evil. I insist that this is so, and until a satisfactory answer is forthcoming to the difficulties adduced in the last two chapters, shall continue in my insistence.

But if the intellect denies what the heart demands—what then? The heart, it is often said, has its reasons of which the head knows nothing. No doubt, but are they reasons which may be trusted? And who, or what is to judge save the head, whether they are to be trusted or not? In effect, then, a deadlock is reached. What is the moral? That the intellect is not to be trusted? We cannot do other than trust it, since the reasons for distrusting it would be themselves of its providing. Nor, as I have already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> have those who have supported the religious hypothesis disdained the intellect's aid.

Perhaps the deadlock is a sign of, perhaps it is even a punishment for, intellectual arrogance. We are often warned in religious writings against the pride of the intellect. . . .

I note in this connection as a fact which may not be wholly unconnected with this warning that the considerations that have

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter II p. 43.

set my mind working again on the problems of religion are not so much of an intellectual, as of an emotional order. What is more—and the fact may again not be without significance—the emotions are those connected with inadequacy. The life that lacks religion lacks, so I have come to feel, fullness and roundness, and the desire to find that true which I have always believed to be false, to know something of that which I have thought to be unknowable, grows as the years pass. One is dismayed by the evil at large in the world and in oneself, depressed and humiliated by the inadequacy of one's efforts to cope with it, humiliated, then, by the inadequacy of one's own self. It is from precisely such a feeling of humiliation that, religious writers have often urged, the search for and need of God, take their rise. What is more, the seeker who is inspired by such a mood may be not wholly without hope of succeeding in his quest. For alienated by intellectual pride God, they have assured us, draws nearer to those who approach Him in humbleness of spirit. 'Humiliation', says Donne, 'is the beginning of sanctification; and as without this, without holiness, no man shall see God, though he pore whole nights upon the Bible; so without that, without humility, no man shall heare God speake to his soule, though Hee heare three two-houres Sermons every day.' Hence if the direct assault of the intellect upon the difficulties I have marshalled fails—and, for me, it does fail—there is nothing for it but to try another route and see if it is not possible to outflank a position which it seems impossible to storm.

This is the method which I have tried in the ensuing chapters to adopt. I have not, that is to say, striven to find an answer to difficulties which I have come to believe unanswerable; I have sought in other considerations of a more positive nature such evidence as might lead an unbiased mind to see in the so-called truths of religion a hypothesis which is at worst tenable and at best the most plausible explanation which offers itself of the facts of existence, as we know them.

## (I) THE SCIENTIFIC PICTURE OF THE COSMOS.

### *The Authority and the Concepts of Science.*

The first of these outflanking considerations is derived from science. The evidence from the sciences has traditionally been



regarded as hostile to religion. Now, it seems, the evidence in so far as it is accepted as relevant—and the question of its relevance is much in doubt—points the other way. This result has come about as follows:

Of all possible schemes of the universe the one most hostile to religion was that sponsored by the science of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The interpretation of the cosmos which was variously known as materialism and as mechanism was directly related to, and in large part based upon, the science of the time. This entailed two definite conceptions. The first was the conception of stuff; things, it was believed, were made of matter and matter was composed of atoms. The second was the conception of law; the workings of nature were held to be determined as those of a machine were determined.

These two conceptions, the conception of stuff and the conception of law, sponsored as they were by science, attained great prestige. The nineteenth century was the century of science's triumph. Science had given us cheap coal and cotton, revolutionized transport, and in a hundred ways changed and ameliorated the life of man. That science was a double-edged tool which was to endow man with powers that he did not know how to use, increase his efficiency in slaughter, and bring his civilization to the verge of destruction—all this lay as yet in the future. The nineteenth century noted only the progress of science. It has been left to us to observe that the progress of science has been accompanied by the retrogression of man.

Because of its practical triumphs, there grew up an almost mystical faith in the omniscience of science. Not only could it transform man's life, it could enable him to know the universe; not only could it render man practical service, it could give him ultimate truth. This faith in science is testified by such phrases as 'scientific accuracy', 'scientific test', 'scientific objectivity', 'the scientific attitude' which suggest that the tests and the attitudes employed and adopted by men of science are the most effective for the purpose of discovering truth; while such expressions as 'science versus superstition' or even 'science versus religion', were regarded as synonyms for the expression 'truth versus falsity.' 'If science says so,' I was once told, 'of course, it's true.'

It is in the same belief that governments desiring to justify

some act of folly or injustice appeal to the authority of science. Thus the Germans invoke science to excuse *racial* persecution, while Jews are expelled from Poland 'according to the latest scientific idea'.

*The Acceptance of the Material as the Type and the Test of Reality.*

Under the influence of these conceptions our civilization has come unconsciously but none the less universally to adopt the scientific conception of reality, the conception which turns to matter for its standard of the real. To be real, then, was to be of the same nature as a piece of matter. Matter was something lying out there in space; it was hard, simple and obvious, constituting an admirable foundation upon which the practical man of horse sense could base his irrefragable convictions.

Now the most obvious thing about matter was that one could see it and touch it. It followed that whatever else was real must be of the same nature as that which one could theoretically see and touch. Hence to enquire into the nature of the things that we saw and touched, to analyse them into their elements and their atoms was to deal directly with reality; to apprehend beauty, to enjoy religious experience, or to feel the pull of moral obligation, was to wander in a world of shadows. Under the leadership of science, commonsense unconsciously adopted the same standards. To use the eye of the body to view the physical world was to acquaint oneself with the real; to use that of the soul to see visions was to become the victim of illusion.

This view, the view that to be real was to be like a piece of matter, was applied with equal rigour and enthusiasm to morals, to poetry, to love, to man's feeling for nature, and to his belief in God. All these, it was supposed, must be ultimately analysable into matter and the movements of matter; that is to say, into the movements of hard, solid, homogeneous particles called atoms. One's appreciation of a sonnet was the movement of atoms and the sonnet itself was another such movement. As Professor Whitehead puts it, 'there are bits of matter, enduring self-identically in space which is otherwise empty. Each bit of matter occupies a definite, limited region. Each such particle of matter has its own private qualifications—such as its shape, its motion, its mass, its colour, its scent. Some of these qualifications change,

others are persistent. The essential relationship between bits of matter is purely spatial. Space itself is eternally unchanging, always including in itself this capacity for the relationship of bits of matter.'

What then, did the bits of matter do? They moved; but as Whitehead goes on to point out, 'locomotion of matter involves change in spatial relationship. It involves nothing more than that.'

The conclusion would seem to be that little bits of matter moving about in space have produced, nay more, that they *are* the colours of a sunset, the beauty of a sonnet, the love of a friend and the understanding of the Binomial Theorem; they are also our knowledge of the little bits; they are also our knowledge that the bits are moving and are the cause of the colours and the rest.

And if you go on to ask whence the colours and the beauty and the love and the understanding derive, the answer is that the mind somehow projects them into or on to the little bits; the mind or rather the brain—since, the mind being by definition immaterial, must, on the hypothesis we are considering, be itself a figment—is stimulated by the impact of the little bits upon the sense organs which consist of more little bits, and proceeds to perform a conjuring trick which invests the world with qualities which—since, after all, the world consists only of the little bits—it has not really got. Thus to quote Whitehead again:

'Nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent; the nightingale for his song: and the sun for his radiance. The poets are entirely mistaken. They should address their lyrics to themselves, and should turn them into odes of self-congratulation on the excellency of the human mind. Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colourless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly.'

### *Surprising Effects of the Acceptance of Materialism.*

This is a surprising view on any showing. Even more surprising, when we remember that the mind itself, being after all nothing more than a brain and nervous system—for what else *could* it be, if matter is the only type of reality?—is composed of the little bits, so that when we say the mind invests the world with its sound, its scent, and so forth, what we mean is that some of the little bits have the capacity of endowing other little bits, or pro-

jecting on to other little bits, qualities which they do not possess; while themselves remaining nothing but little bits all the time. Neither the projecting little bits *have* the qualities, nor do the recipient little bits *have* the qualities; yet the qualities somehow get generated and projected.

It is easy to be wise after the event. Yet in retrospect it is difficult to avoid a feeling of surprise that such an obviously unpalatable view of reality should ever have been found acceptable, of astonishment, that it should *still* be found acceptable.

For commonsense, which is apt to embody the petrified science of 50 years ago, still instinctively pronounces that only material things are real—at least, it does so on six days in the week, qualifying the pronouncement with the conventional admission of the reality of spiritual things on Sunday. Thus students taking their first course in philosophy, while unhesitatingly proclaiming the reality of seven apples feel an instinctive doubt as to the title to full reality of the number seven. When pressed, they are inclined to say that seven is an idea in the mind, or is an abstraction, thereby indicating their view that in some undefined way seven is something less than wholly real. 'Why,' I ask, 'less than real?' Because apparently it is not visible and tangible; is not, that is to say, material, and is not in space. It is interesting to reflect that the predecessors of my students some 600 years ago would have pronounced with equal confidence the reality of the spiritual in the shape of the angels, devils and demons who watched them for their protection or temptation, but, as good sons of the Church, would have felt considerable reluctance in according full reality to the gross objects of material sense.

### *The Universe as a Machine.*

Parallel with the view that to be real was to be a substance, tangible and visible, was the belief that whatever was real must be subject to the laws which were observed to operate in the physical world—that it must work, in short, like a machine. As Sir Arthur Eddington has put it, nineteenth-century science was disposed, as soon as it scented a piece of mechanism, to exclaim, 'here we are getting to bedrock. This is what things should resolve themselves into. This is ultimate reality.' The implication again was that whatever did not work like a machine—the sense

of value, for example, or the belief in God—was not quite real, or, even if the sense and the belief were admitted to be real, since, after all, they *really* were experienced, that the objects which they apparently affirmed were not.

*Evolution as a Determined Process.*

A corollary of this view, was the conception of evolution as a determined process, working automatically through the operation of immutable laws. This conception had been largely fostered by the discoveries of Darwin. These were thought to show that the evolution of life from its earliest beginnings to its most elaborate product, the mind of the nineteenth-century scientist, was due to the occurrence of small variations in species developing in the environment in which they appeared according to ascertainable laws.

This process by which life had developed from the earliest forms of living organism up to its latest and most elaborate product was gradual, continuous and in theory traceable. The earliest forms of life were thought to have appeared as specks of protoplasmic jelly in the scum left by the tides as they receded from the shores of the world's first seas. In the warm waters of the proterozoic seas from six hundred million to sixty million years ago, there were amoebas and there were jelly fish; the earth grew cooler and drier, life left the waters and proliferated into enormous reptile-like creatures, the dinosaurs and gigantosaurus of the mesozoic age; cooler and drier still, and there were birds and mammals. Among them was a smaller lemur-like creature, a comparatively late comer, whose descendants split into two branches; the one developed into the anthropoid apes, the other culminated in man.

Such was the process which Darwin envisaged, the process of the evolution of life as a consequence of the operation of purely natural forces.

Now the laws which governed the development of this process were known. Briefly, they were summed up in the formula, natural selection operating through the struggle for survival.

Variations in species occurred; that is to say, to certain creatures there were born offspring which exhibited differences from their parents. These differences would be of two kinds: either

they would assist the creature in the struggle for existence, or they would handicap it. If they assisted it, the creature would secure a larger share of the available food, would prosper accordingly, choose a well-nourished mate exhibiting a similar variation, and produce offspring in which the original difference was reproduced and intensified: thus a new species gradually came into being. If they did not, the creature would be eliminated and its unsuccessful variation would be eliminated with it. Thus by a process of automatic sifting out, nature 'selects' those who, in virtue of the variations which they embody, possess an advantage in the struggle for existence.

Now Darwin conceived these 'variations' as small modifications, appearing by chance, and becoming gradually more marked in each generation in which they appeared. Ultimately, under the influence of natural selection they would become so pronounced as to constitute what would in effect amount to a new species. Thus new species developed out of older ones as the result of the gradual accumulation of chance minute variations.

### *Cosmic Implications of Materialism.*

Such were the three main foundations of the so-called scientific view of the universe: the conception of matter as the only form of reality, the conception of the mechanical as the only kind of law, and the conception of evolution as an automatically determined process, throwing up mind as a result of the operation of the same forces, the same *natural* forces, as had governed the development first of inorganic matter and then of organic life. A universe built from these foundations was conceived after the model of a gigantic clock. How the clock was assembled, who wound it up, were unanswerable, perhaps illegitimate questions, but, once started, the clock proceeded to function automatically through the interaction of its various parts. In the course of this interaction, the parts had thrown up life, and life had generated consciousness. Life so conceived is not an essential factor in the universe in terms of which we must interpret the remainder, but an incidental product, a sort of outside passenger, thrown up, or off, in the haphazard course of evolution; an outside passenger, moreover, who will one day finish his journey with as little stir as once in the person of the amoeba he began it. In every

direction the material and the brutal underlies and conditions the vital and the spiritual; matter everywhere determines mind, mind nowhere determines matter.

The implications of such a view for the prospects of humanity are not encouraging. Humanity, in fact, is doomed in advance. There was a time when our planet was not suitable for mankind; it was too hot and too moist. A time will come when it will cease to be suitable; it will be too cold and too dry. When the sun goes out, a catastrophe that is bound to be, mankind will long ago have disappeared from the earth. No doubt it may by then have succeeded in transferring itself to other planets, but if the second law of Thermo-Dynamics is valid, it is not only the earth, but the whole physical universe which will, sooner or later, become uninhabitable by life. It will be a long time before the physical universe reaches a condition of evenly distributed energy, but eventually it will reach it, and when it does, life in any physical form in which we are able to conceive it will be impossible; for in the condition of stagnant eventlessness which an even energy distribution would entail no physical organism could function. I shall examine the implications of this view in more detail below.<sup>1</sup>

Discouraging for humanity, the implications are disastrous for religion. There is no God, there is not even a purpose that makes for good at the heart of the universe, for the universe has no heart. There is no world other than the world of things that appear, things that are known by the senses and analysed by chemistry and physics, and obedient to the laws which chemistry and physics discover. Religion, then, is a myth, the expression of wish fulfilment; man anthropomorphizes the figments of his imagination, and to comfort his insignificance and escape his loneliness projects them in the shape of God into an empty universe. Of this conception also I shall have more to say in a later chapter;<sup>2</sup> for the present it is sufficient to note that, if it be true, God is a delusion and man's religious experience a will o' the wisp. Thus the scientific view of the universe which was generally accepted until a few years ago ruled religion out of court. Either science was true and religion false, or *vice versa*. In spite of all their

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter V, p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter VI, p. 210-214.

vaunted reconciliations there was in fact no means of accommodating both within the bounds of the same universe.

## II. THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE SCIENTIFIC PICTURE OF THE COSMOS

The scientific foundation upon which the materialist scheme of the universe was based no longer exists. The fact is familiar to most educated people and there is no need to dwell upon considerations which I have set out at length in other books.<sup>1</sup> It will be well, however, briefly to indicate in outline the nature of the situation which to-day precludes its acceptance, without covering ground already traversed by showing how that situation has been brought about.

### (i) *The Unplausibility of the Materialist Concept of Matter.*

The foundation for the materialist view of matter was the nineteenth-century atom, a hard, simple, obvious little lump of stuff. This has disappeared. Modern matter is something infinitely attenuated and elusive; it is a hump in space time, a 'mush' of electricity, a wave of probability undulating into nothingness. Frequently it turns out not to be matter at all, but a projection from the consciousness of its perceiver. The considerations which have led to the disappearance of the solid atom have been afforded by physics. They are, in other words, the product of observation and experiment. But it may be doubted whether the materialist's world of bits of stuff moving in space could ever have seemed convincing to anybody who was prepared to look beyond the blinkers of science. For whatever scientific evidence nineteenth-century physics may have been able to adduce in its support, its conclusions were based on an untenable theory of perception. This theory pre-supposed that knowledge of a world of things lying out there in space was vouchsafed by a divine revelation to the mind of the enquiring physicist, who perceived it exactly as it was. In other words, it pre-supposed the dogma of commonsense that physical things exist precisely as we suppose them to do, the mind which knows

<sup>1</sup> See notably my *Guide to Modern Thought*, Chapters IV-VI, and *Philosophy for our Times*, Chapters III-VI.



them neither contributing to nor altering that which it knows. More precisely, the primary qualities of things, their number, motion and position in space were presumed to exist precisely as commonsense supposes, but their secondary qualities, their colour, temperature, texture, taste, sound and so on, not so to exist. These we were asked to believe, were somehow projected by the mind on to the material things which were presented to it. As physics progressed, more and more qualities were taken away from the thing and attributed to the mind's activity, until in the end only position in space and motion were left. Indeed, the latest researches which have built up the picture of the modern atom have reduced the process to its logical absurdity by requiring the physicist—for the physicist, too, is, we must suppose, on occasion a lover—to suppose that the redness of the lips that he kisses, the softness of the skin that he touches, the texture of the hair that he strokes, the contours of the face that he admires—that all these are neither more nor less than charges of negative and positive electricity; or rather, that their basis consists of charges of negative and positive electricity, while the actual qualities that he admires—the feel, the texture, the contours, the colours, and so forth—are, somehow, supplied by himself.

But this is to anticipate. The point that I am making is that the physics upon which materialism was based either dispensed with theory of perception altogether and simply assumed that things were as they appeared, or else bifurcated the object perceived, leaving some of the qualities out there in the world and transferring others to the mind of the perceiver.

### *The Relevance of Theory of Perception.*

Now it did not require much training in philosophy to engender the conviction that whatever might be the true account of perception and of the world it revealed, it was reasonably certain that neither of these views could be true. The statement seems dogmatic, and for the reasons for it I must refer readers to other books.<sup>1</sup> I am concerned here not with reasons, but with conclusions, and the conclusions may be stated in the form of a dilemma. Either (1) the mind contributes to, or even constructs the objects we perceive; or (2) it does not. If it does, then there

<sup>1</sup> More particularly my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapters I-III.

is no ground for bifurcating the qualities of these things and saying that some of them, like temperature and colour, are supplied by us while others, like shape and substance, belong to the thing in its own right. If we reject bifurcation, then either (a) all the qualities which we see in a thing belong to it in its own right, or (b) none of them do. The modern analysis of the theory of perception has practically ruled alternative (a) out of court. The commonest variant of alternative (b) takes the form of maintaining that there is no physical world at all, and that whatever it is that we know in perception, it is something whose nature is mental. It is, that is to say, either a modification of our own experience, or an aspect of a unity of knowledge, or an expression of mind stuff, or ideas in our minds or in God's mind or in the minds of most people, or colonies of souls.

Now let us consider alternative (2). If we like to hold that the mind contributes nothing to what it perceives, then we may still retain the notion of an external world, even of an external physical world, provided that we no longer think of it in terms of physical things like chairs and tables, but conceive it after the model of what the philosopher calls sense data; that is to say, raps of sound, patches of colour, felt surfaces, odours, tastes, whatever in fact we immediately experience through our senses when we have sense experience. Now it may well be the case that this world of sense data, unlike that of chairs and tables, owes nothing to our minds. The conclusion is as follows: if we retain the commonsense view that the mind in perception is simply aware of a world which is presented to it, then we cannot retain the commonsense view that the world consists of physical things like chairs and tables. If we want to retain a world which consists of chairs and tables, then we must hold that many, perhaps all of their qualities are bestowed upon them by the minds that know them.

I am speaking here only of the findings of the theory of perception. From other points of view there are, no doubt, good grounds for supposing that the external world consists of atoms and electrons, of ether waves, of positive and negative charges of electricity, or of the mathematical physicists' point-events. This is not a book on the nature of the external world, still less on our knowledge of it and the complexities of this extremely difficult

matter do not concern us here. What does concern us is the conclusion that there is no basis either in physics or philosophy for the nineteenth-century conception of independent lumps of comparatively featureless material stuff, whose configurations were thought to be responsible for the infinite variety of the world that we know.

Speaking for myself, I should say that there are, broadly, two views which it is possible to hold on this subject. The first one attributes to the mind a large, indeed a dominant part in the construction of the world we know. It is the mind which invests the point-events of the physicist with their solidity, colour, temperature, continuity, smell, sound, and the rest. This, the idealist conclusion, is wholly destructive of materialism because it pre-supposes that in an important sense mind is prior, logically prior, that is to say, to matter. And by saying that it is 'logically prior', I mean that the very bricks with which the materialists built the structure of a world in which mind had no independent place are, on this view, such as mind has already provided.

According to the second view, the world exists independently of the mind that knows it, but exists with *all* the qualities that the mind discerns in it; <sup>1</sup> not only, that is to say, with its space and motion, but with its warmth and colour; not only with its warmth and colour, but also with its beauty and ugliness, its good and evil, even its healthiness and morbidity. This view is equally destructive of the materialist hypothesis, not so much because it gives primacy to mind, although the knowing mind that it postulates is a distinct and independent activity and not a mere by-product of matter, but because it affirms the real existence of *non-material* entities and qualities, more particularly those that are associated with value and disvalue. If the world can contain real entities which are not material but which can be known by minds, it is possible that among them there may be God.

This second view is the one which I am personally disposed to hold, not with any degree of certainty—the questions at issue are

<sup>1</sup> It is possible to combine this view which is known as 'Conceptual Realism' with the view that the immediate objects of our awareness in *sensory* experience are sense data, that is to say with alternative (2) above.

too difficult and controversial for any reasonable man to hold any such view with certainty—but as the one which appears to me the least unpalatable of the many in the field. If the idealist conclusion be correct, the only form of existence is mind, and the suggestion that at the heart of the universe there is the mind of a person becomes in the highest degree likely. I am not myself an idealist in the philosophical sense of the word, but it is pertinent to point out that the second of the two views mentioned above, although perhaps it is not so immediately favourable to the religious hypothesis as the idealist, is certainly not inconsistent with it. If its implications do not require, they certainly do not exclude God.

(ii) *The Modern Concept of Cause.*

Materialism entailed mechanism; it entailed, that is to say, that there should be only one kind of causation in the universe, that this should operate universally, and that the causation should be of the kind which is most pre-eminently illustrated by the workings of a machine. Mechanical causation embodies three distinctive features; first, it conceives of the cause as prior to the effect in point of time; secondly, it conceives of the cause as active in the sense that it somehow *produces* the effect; thirdly, it postulates an element of compulsion in the cause such that, given the cause, the effect has no option but to follow it. Priority in time, productive capacity and necessity—these were the three distinctive characteristics of a mechanical causation which was held to be universally operative. For hard-headed men of science it was a curiously mystical conception. As early as the eighteenth century, Hume had shown that there was no possibility of demonstrating either productive capacity or compulsion. There was, he pointed out, every reason for supposing that cause and effect were related *as if* the cause produced and necessarily produced the effect, but no ground for supposing that it actually did so. There were various answers to Hume, but none were convincing, except perhaps such as outflanked the problem by denying the existence of a world of physical events altogether.

More wary than their nineteenth-century predecessors, contemporary physicists do not invoke the operations of a cause

which is conceived as a necessary and compulsive force. The issues involved in a discussion of this topic are technical, and can here be mentioned only very summarily. Three points may be noted.

First, the Newtonian conception of force has been modified. The essence of this conception was that action operated from a distance. Thus the force of gravity operated over the distance that separated the apple from the earth and pulled the apple down to the earth; that is to say, an influence was supposed to emanate from the earth, pass over the intervening space, hit upon the apple and carry it downwards. This conception of action from a distance is no longer held. Under the influence of the theory of Relativity, twentieth-century physics tends to account for the movements of an entity X solely in terms of happenings in the *immediate* vicinity of X. The so-called effects upon X would not, that is to say, now be ascribed to some force emanating from an object Y separated from X by a distance in space and an interval in time, but to events immediately contiguous to X in space-time. Thus when we say that the sun causes effects upon the earth, we mean not that the sun sends out waves of light or heat, but that there are modifications of space-time all round the sun. These modifications are more intense near the place of origin, less intense as we travel away from it. We can learn the rules by means of which these modifications occur and the laws in obedience to which they travel outwards from the place in which they originated; when these modifications reach the place where the earth is, we call them the effects produced by the influence of the sun, but to say that the sun causes the modifications is to add nothing to our knowledge, which is merely to the effect that certain modifications travel in a certain direction according to certain ascertainable rules. Now the so-called law of cause and effect constitutes a particular case of force operating from and over a distance, and the law is, therefore, affected by the abandonment of the general conception of which it is a special case.

### *The Fallacy of 'Simple Location'.*

Secondly, the expressions which we are driven to employ when we speak of the law of cause and effect pre-suppose that there are in the universe separate, isolated things existing in

different places, and that of these things one, the cause, produces another, the effect, by virtue of the causal influence that emanates from the first and travels across the space and time which separate them. In other words, the expressions employed and, indeed, necessitated by the theory pre-suppose the world of nineteenth-century physics according to which a given piece of matter is at a given place at a given time. This conception of matter being at a place at a time has been stigmatized by Professor Whitehead as 'the fallacy of simple location'. Professor Whitehead calls it a fallacy because it does not accord with the evidence as to the nature of the universe afforded by modern physics. Moreover, although it has always been associated with mechanical causation, the fallacy is, in fact, incompatible with the theory of causation which is supposed to entail it; for, if the events are really separate, how, Professor Whitehead asks, can they be brought together in the way in which the holding of the causal relation between them pre-supposes? The causal relation, as ordinarily conceived, may be likened to a thread, which, stretching out from the first event, tacks it on to the second. But if this were the case, an exhaustive inspection of the first event would reveal the starting point of the thread in the event. It would, therefore, reveal the first event as being causally linked on to something else and as being, therefore, not completely separate from it. The point of Professor Whitehead's criticism is, then, that if we reflect carefully on what the notion of causal connection involves, we cannot avoid seeing that it is not compatible with an absolute separation of events.

### *The Continuity of Physical Process.*

This brings me to the third point, that modern physics has ceased to represent the world as a series of separate events happening in or to separate pieces of matter, located in separate places, and has substituted the notion of continuity of physical processes. A clap of thunder, for example, is no longer regarded as a single event, but the travelling outward from a centre at an ascertainable velocity of waves in the atmosphere, which are characterized by a certain periodicity and frequency of wavelength. When the waves reach the place at which our eardrums are, we are said to hear the clap, and this so-called hearing of

the clap would normally be regarded as an event separate from the events which constitute the clap. In fact, however, the physiological events in my outer and inner ears, and the neural impulses that travel as a result of these events to the brain, are only later events in the process whose earlier events were the spreading outward of the waves in the atmosphere. When the notion of a continuous process is substituted for that of a series of separate events, the conception of cause and effect as a law operating between two separate events becomes inappropriate. Thus for a variety of reasons the kind of causation which the mechanist theory of the universe requires, long regarded as untenable by philosophers, is now in large measure rejected by physicists; as Bertrand Russell puts it, 'the language of cause and effect (of which "force" is a particular case) is thus merely a convenient shorthand for certain purposes; it does not represent anything that is genuinely to be found in the physical world.'

(iii) *The Unplausibility of the Materialist Conception of the Living Organism.*

The controversy between mechanism and vitalism in biology is voluminous; I have myself participated in it, extensively rather than wisely, and I do not want to traverse here the ground already covered in other books.<sup>1</sup> The materialist view is that not only the origin but the development of life can be explained in terms of ever-changing combinations of material particles; the vitalist maintains that in addition to the particles the evidence requires us to postulate the presence and activity of some vital principle not analysable in terms of material stuff, and not wholly subject to the laws of physics and chemistry. (A third view is that the organism must be regarded as a single unified whole, an embodied mind, or as it is sometimes called, an 'en-minded' body which can never be wholly analysed in terms of its component parts, and whose behaviour is never wholly describable in terms of the laws which govern the behaviour of its component parts. I shall have occasion to refer to this view in another connection.<sup>2</sup>) In this controversy I have taken

<sup>1</sup> See my *Matter, Life and Value*, Chapters IV and V, and my *Guide to Modern Thought*, Chapter VI.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 7, pp. 234, 235.

the side of the vitalists. I postulated for many years the activity of a substantive vital principle conceived after the model of Shaw's Life Force, or Bergson's *Élan Vital*, which entered into living organisms and directed their activity in pursuit of its purpose, moulding and playing upon matter as the fingers of a potter mould clay, or the fingers of a pianist play on the notes of his instrument.

The criticisms which have been brought against Substantial Vitalism, in, for example, such a book as Professor Broad's *The Mind and its place in Nature*, are difficult to meet and I have more recently found it prudent to limit my participation in this controversy to the maintenance of the negative position that it is impossible to explain the facts of developing life and consciousness in terms of combinations of material particles, without committing myself to any statement as to the nature of the additional factor or principle which, if I am right, must be invoked to explain the distinctive behaviour of living organisms. Indeed, I have come to believe that questions touching the nature of life and mind are not in the last resort scientific questions at all, but belong to the spheres of philosophy and religion. Whether they are questions which religion can answer, it is in part the object of this book to consider. If the religious hypothesis is true in respect of any part of what it asserts, then, it is obvious, the nature of life, the mode of its interaction with matter and the part it plays in matter's development cannot at any point be adequately discussed, without recourse to modes of explanation which pass beyond the sphere of science and invoke the concepts of religion. However, this is to anticipate. For the moment I am concerned only with the grounds for the rejection of the mechanist interpretation of biological phenomena. Broadly, these are four.

(a) *The Appearance of New Qualities in a Non-Creative Universe.*

The first, which is logical, is concerned with the origin of qualities. It may be stated in the form of a principle which seems to me to be self-evident. The principle is that you cannot from a combination of things, none of which possesses a certain quality, produce something which has the quality. To illustrate, you cannot from the combination of non-coloured entities produce colour; of non-shaped entities, shape; of non-material



entities, matter. That you cannot, seems to me to be self-evident. I am, of course, aware of the modern doctrine of emergence which makes much of the fact that from the combination of oxygen and hydrogen, neither of which is wet, you can produce water, which has the quality of wetness. I shall return to this doctrine in the next chapter. For the present, it is enough to point out that of two things, one must be true. Either the wetness was somehow present in the oxygen and hydrogen to begin with, or it was not. If it was not, it is literally new; new, that is to say, in the sense of not being present in the universe before the combination of oxygen and hydrogen was effected, and the universe, therefore, is a creative universe. It is, that is to say, a universe which is continually bringing to birth new qualities. This view materialism must deny, since it implies that the universe is one in which something is continually coming out of nothing. Materialism, then, must maintain that the wetness was already present in the constituents oxygen and hydrogen and in the surrounding environment, though present in a latent or unobservable form.

Let us provisionally accept this explanation, and apply it to the question which at present concerns us, the question of the nature of life. Now the quality of being alive is a fact which quite certainly belongs to some of the constituents of the universe. On the basis of my principle we must deny that it is possible for a combination of entities not having the quality of being alive, to produce something which has the quality. Accepting the materialist mode of explanation, as we have for the sake of argument agreed to do, we are driven to the conclusion that since the universe, if it is a material universe, cannot be creative in the sense just described, life must have been present in the particles of matter from the first, although latent and unobservable. Matter, then, if we adopt the materialist mode of explanation in the case of the quality of wetness and apply it to the quality of 'livingness', is not everything. Always and as well there has been life.

*(b) Variations in Living Species.*

If there is life, and if life is a free, creative principle, it is possible to account for the occurrence of variations; if there is

only matter, we cannot but regard them as unaccountable. Yet without variations there could not have been new species, unless we are to assume a number of separate acts of creation, acts presumably performed by an intelligence, which, of course, is precisely what, if one is a materialist, one cannot do. This difficulty, the difficulty of accounting for variations remains unaffected, whether we believe that new species arise as a result of the gradual accumulation over large numbers of generations of very small variations—the Darwinian view—or whether we take the more modern view that new species can occur as the result of mutations in the germ plasm. For a small unaccountable variation is no less an outrage on materialist principles than an unaccountable mutation. Darwin did not seek to account for variations; he professed agnosticism or ascribed them to chance, which, after all, is only another way of saying that he could not account for them.

The modern view is that the genes, the little packets of chemicals which constitute the physical basis of inheritance and which usually persist in precisely the same form from generation to generation, occasionally exhibit unaccountable changes known as mutations.

‘Occasionally’, I am quoting from Julian Huxley’s Essay, entitled *The Origins of Species*—

‘a change occurs in the gene—it mutates, as we say in technical parlance, and then it persists in its new altered form until a fresh mutation occurs.’

From these mutations there results what Huxley calls ‘one of the most startling facts, which would have been regarded as impossible by earlier generations of biologists’, the fact ‘that new species may arise suddenly, at a single bound’.

Huxley proceeds to describe the machinery of inheritance, the division of cells and the splitting of chromosomes by means of which the mutation becomes instrumental in creating a new species.

‘Normally, when a cell divides, its chromosomes all split lengthwise and the halves separate, so that each daughter-cell receives a complete set. Occasionally, however, though the chromosomes split, the cell misses the division, so that it and its descendants have double the number of chromosomes.’

But all this is a question of machinery only. The variation is necessary to provide the raw material of what Huxley calls 'the building blocks of evolution', without which the machinery would have no material to operate and new species could not arise. Variations, then, are a necessary condition of the functioning of the evolutionary process. Yet apparently they are causeless, causeless, that is to say, from the standpoint of the concepts of mechanical causation, which is the only kind of causation that science recognizes. Granted that there is a principle of life in the universe, that the activity of life is in part exempt from mechanical determinism, that life is to this extent free and creative, then variations may be regarded as one of the expressions of its activity. Life's activity, on this view, operates in and upon matter, the matter of the genes; the expression and result of life's operations is a mutation, and the occurrence of new species through variations is understandable. But unless we are to postulate the activity of such a principle, the process which we know as the evolution of species could never have begun, through lack of a raw material upon which the classical factors of survival and natural selection could operate.

(c) *The Distinctive Behaviour of the Living Organism.*

It has further seemed to me to be necessary to postulate such a principle in order to explain the distinctive behaviour of living organisms. Can such behaviour, one wonders, ever be satisfactorily accounted for on the assumption that living organisms (including ourselves) are highly complicated automata, and that their minds, if they have minds, play no part in determining what they do. The question is, of course, highly controversial, and there is much to be said on both sides. On the one hand, it is possible to cite a number of apparently differentiating characteristics in living organisms, characteristics, that is to say, which they do not appear to share with inanimate matter—for example, the growth of the embryo, the peculiar nature of the organism's reaction to a stimulus, its apparently purposive behaviour, its power of growing new and replacing damaged tissue, its ability to nourish itself by taking in substances from outside and to reproduce itself—and to insist that none of these characteristics can be adequately accounted for in terms of the

laws which govern the behaviour of inanimate matter. All, it may be maintained, are radically different from the characteristics of machines. The conclusion to which such considerations would seem to point is that the organism must be regarded as the vehicle or repository of an activity of life which uses and directs the matter of which the body is composed, in pursuance of purposes which only an intelligence, however rudimentary, could conceive.

On the other hand, it is possible so to treat these apparently distinctively vital characteristics of living organisms as to exhibit them as the determined functions of a highly complex and infinitely 'conditionable' neural and cerebral apparatus. For the living organism, it may be said, though it is infinitely more complex than any machine made by man, is subject nevertheless in the last resort to the same laws of chemistry and physics as those which govern the workings of all physical things, of organisms, no less than of machines. Admittedly, we cannot in many instances see how these laws can be made to apply, but our inability in this respect is due to insufficient knowledge and not to any radical difference of nature, such as would be entailed by the supposition that the organism is *not* composed wholly of matter or that its behaviour is *not* wholly capable of explanation in terms of the laws that govern the behaviour of matter. Meanwhile, every increase in our knowledge of the body, of the structure and behaviour of living cells, of the influence of the secretions of the ductless glands, and of the functions of the brain, makes the explanation of living behaviour in terms of mechanical laws more plausible. Ultimately it may be hoped, sufficient knowledge will have been obtained to close the gap between the so-called animate and the so-called inanimate and enable what has hitherto appeared as the distinctive behaviour of living things to be explained in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry. At any rate, say the scientists in effect, we must proceed in the hope that this assumption will be justified, for it is only on the assumption that the organism is a complex automaton, whose behaviour is ultimately explicable in terms of determined responses to determining stimuli, that we can increase our knowledge of its nature and its behaviour.

I have, as I say, participated to a considerable extent in this controversy, and have ventured to take sides. I use the word

'venture' advisedly, since the considerations upon which it mainly turns lie outside the sphere of philosophy, and only scientists can pronounce upon them with authority. Nevertheless, it has seemed to me that none of the considerations upon which the materialist mode of explanation rests is conclusive, and I am convinced now as I have always been, that any interpretation of living behaviour which relies exclusively on materialist and mechanist concepts is not adequate and cannot be made so. The reasons for this view are given in the early chapters of my *Matter, Life and Value*. Here I am concerned only to register the fact that these reasons still seem to me to be conclusive, and the conclusion to which they point is that living organisms are always more than machines, and more by reason of their incorporation of an immaterial principle which animates them and expresses itself in some part at least of their behaviour.

(d) *The Nature of Change and Development.*

The fourth ground for dissatisfaction with the mechanist account of life derives from a philosophical examination of the concept of change. Influenced by Bergson's philosophy, I have always believed that change is real, even if it is not, as Bergson suggests, the only form of reality. To say that change is real, means that one is not prepared to accept the materialist view that the only kind of change that can occur is a change in the arrangement of materials which do not themselves change, as, for example, when the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle can be used to make any one of a number of designs, or no design at all, without themselves undergoing any change in respect of their own nature. I emphasize that this view of change is necessarily involved by the materialist view of the universe. Materialism must, that is to say, attribute all the differences between things and all the apparent changes in things to the changing combinations of a number of unchanging basic constituents. These, the ultimate particles of matter, have in recent years been conceived after a number of different models, but whatever the analysis of matter that happens to be fashionable at the moment, its ultimate constituents must, if materialism is true, be themselves eternal. If they are not, if there is change in substance and not merely change in the arrangements of unchanging substances,

then new things or new qualities of things must from time to time come into existence. The universe, in other words, must be creative. Now creation, even if it does not imply mind, at least implies the presence in the universe of an incalculable element, whose operations escape the framework of mechanical causation. For if the created thing is caused, it cannot be created, since, as Hume pointed out, being entailed by its cause, it must, in some sense, be foreshadowed in its cause. A created thing must, therefore, be an uncaused thing and the creative element in the universe must be an incalculable element. It is I think, for these reasons, though they are not often made explicit, that mechanist science, in pursuit of its endeavour to bring everything under the aegis of universal causal laws, denies creation, denies, therefore, change in substance and restricts the notion of change to the re-arrangement of unchanging given particulars.

Into the reasons for rejecting this view of change I cannot here enter; I confine myself to stating my conviction of its inadequacy. If I am right, change does occur and is real. There is, that is to say, something which is literally different and, therefore, something which is literally new in the universe at some moments of time, as compared with what there was at other moments. It may very well be the case that there is something literally different and literally new at every moment of time. The acceptance of this conclusion, the conclusion, namely, that change is real in the sense thus defined, seems to me to be an essential condition of any theory of development. For development means that there is literally more in the developed product than there was in the germ from which it takes its rise; more in the oak than in the acorn; more in the man than in the embryo; more in the embryo than in the amoeba.

The recognition of the truth that development entails real change and entails, therefore, real novelty has a special significance in relation to the development of mind. It is in effect a special case of the first of the arguments which I have used against the materialist interpretation of biology, the argument, namely, from the appearance of new qualities.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion of the argument was, it will be remembered, that it is impossible, from the association of non-mental particles, to produce mind.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 129, 130.

What is the bearing of the present argument from change on that conclusion?

*The Occurrence of Mental Facts in the Shape of New Knowledge.*

Let us suppose, as the materialist does, that this world is the only world and that it is composed exclusively of matter and its constituents. Now there are in the world certain mental facts which I will call facts of knowledge; for example, we will assume that I *know* the differential calculus, an engineer *knows* how to build a bridge, an interpreter *knows* ten different languages. If there has always been mind in the universe (whether the mind of a creative person or mere raw, undifferentiated mental energy or activity, I am not here concerned to enquire) and if mind is creative, the existence of the sort of facts exemplified by these mental attainments is intelligible. There are, we should say, real changes in the universe and some of these changes occur in and to minds. Minds, in fact, not only change, but develop, and part of their development consists in the achievement of the understanding of certain truths—for example, the understanding of the truth of the differential calculus, or the mastery of the principles of bridge-building—which were hitherto unknown.

But now let us suppose that there is no development but only change in the arrangement of what was already given. Then knowledge of the differential calculus and the understanding of the principles of bridge-building, must always have been present *in some form* in the universe, must have been present, then, if the universe is, as the materialists postulate, composed entirely of material particles, when our planet and, indeed, the whole solar system was still in a nebulous condition; was, that is to say, a white-hot mass of gaseous material. This is difficult to believe.

There seem, then, to be two alternatives. If change and development are real, then there can have been a time when these mental attainments, the understanding and the knowledge, to which I have referred, were not, and there is, therefore, real novelty in the universe in the sense that at some point in time these attainments literally came into being. If, however, they have always existed, then, admittedly, we need not suppose them to have been created or to have developed out of nothing, but

since, being facts of knowledge, they must have existed in *some* mind, for example, in God's mind, it will follow that there has always been mind. The first supposition entails real change or development which, for the reasons given, no materialist can admit; the second, that mind has always existed, which once again no materialist can admit.

(iv) *The Unplausibility of the Materialist View of Mind.*

This last consideration takes us from the realm of biology into that of psychology and may be put into the form of the question, is the mechanist account of mind from any point of view acceptable? Once again I must plead the reader's indulgence for stating a set of conclusions without giving the grounds on which they are based. These I have set out in other books.<sup>1</sup>

It does not seem to me to be possible to explain the facts of mental life on the assumption that mind is an epiphenomenal occurrence whose function is that of registering the events that occur in the body and the brain. I do not wish to deny that mind does in fact register such events, but I should maintain that it overflows the brain and that mental life is, therefore, always richer than bodily life in the sense that some part at least of what takes place in the mind has no necessary correlate in the events which take place in the body. I should further maintain that mind which escapes complete determination by the body, escapes also complete determination by *its* own past, and that freewill is, therefore, a fact. The nature of moral experience also seems to me to entail that freewill is a fact, yet, if it is a fact, it is one which is incompatible with a deterministic view of mind. Finally, I do not believe that poetry consists merely of black marks on a white background, music of waves consisting of regions of greater or less pressure travelling through the atmosphere, and I do not believe that a performance upon a violin can be adequately described as the drawing of the hairs of a dead horse across the entrails of a dead cat. But if there is in fact more in poetry and music than such accounts as can be given of them in terms of matter and its movements would allow, then it would seem to me that this 'more' demands interpretation in terms which postulate the reality of mind and spirit.

<sup>1</sup> See my *Matter, Life and Value* and *Guide to Philosophy*.



*The Logical Argument against Mental Determinism.*

This is, I am aware, merely to state a view which, in the absence of discussions of psychology and physiology, for which this book was not intended, wears the appearance of a dogma. There is, however, one argument of a logical kind whose two virtues, brevity and convincingness, constitute a temptation to inclusion which I am unable to resist. The argument is as follows: If the mind is a by-product of the brain, and events in the mind are determined by those which occur in the brain, then events in the mind have precisely the same status as that of any other bodily event.

Now we are accustomed to think that ideas have the property of being true. The question 'What is the meaning of truth?' is controversial. Let us, however, take the commonsense view and non-committally regard the meaning of truth as being correspondence with fact. If, for example, there are four people in a room and I think or judge that there are four people in the room, my thought or judgement would be called true because of a fact other than the thought or judgement with which the thought or judgement corresponded. It is entailed by this view of the meaning of truth that a mind can dispassionately observe facts and report what it observes. It is entailed, that is to say, that a mind can take note of evidence, can be influenced by the evidence and, when it thinks truly, can correctly describe or report the evidence.

Now if the materialist view of mind be correct, this conception of a mind as influenced by and directly reporting evidence must be erroneous since the condition of the mind, and, therefore, the ideas in the mind are, on the materialist view, determined at any given moment by the state of the body. Hence if ideas are the reflections of bodily events, in the sense that, given the bodily event, there *must* occur the idea which is its mental correlate, an idea cannot possibly be true in the sense of taking note of, correctly reporting and so corresponding with fact. Indeed, on this view, it would be as meaningless to say that an idea was true as to say that one's blood pressure was true. Ideas exist, just as the condition of one's blood pressure exists, but, since they refer only to the events of the body which they reflect, they cannot refer to, or correspond with, a situation outside the body. Ideas may, I suppose, be chemically true in the sense that they can *truly* reflect

the state of the body, but they cannot be logically true in the sense of corresponding with or directly reporting an objective situation or reality outside the body. Now the philosophy of materialism is a set of ideas, of ideas about the nature of the universe, the status of mind and its relation to the body. But if what materialism asserts about the mind is correct, then these ideas cannot possibly be true: they do not, that is to say (always assuming that the materialist hypothesis is true), tell us about the nature of the universe or about the relation of the mind to the body, or, indeed, about anything whatever external to ourselves. They merely report the fact that the body and brain of the materialist who has the ideas are in a certain condition, in that condition, namely, which is reflected by the ideas in question. Generalizing the conclusion of this argument, we may say that, if mind is merely an epiphenomenon on matter, if consciousness is a by-product of the brain, or if, as many biologists assert, the intellect is a purely practical faculty, a machine which evolution has devised for helping us to secure nourishment or sexual satisfaction, then the mind cannot make any kind of valid judgement about the nature of things, since the judgements that it does make will always be determined by the bodily condition or the psychological needs of the organism to which it belongs. This conclusion will apply to the judgements made by materialists, that is to say, to the philosophy of materialism.

### (III) A RETROSPECT: THE REACTION FROM NINETEENTH-CENTURY SCIENCE

It is important to determine the precise bearing and significance of the foregoing considerations; important to realize how much, in so far as they are valid, they prove; important also to realize how little they prove.

In the nineteenth century the Church imprudently gave battle to science, particularly to biological science. The battle was for the Church a series of almost continuous defeats. Rushing in where *savants* feared to tread, an army of unprepared and uninformed clergymen were beaten off the field by the withering fire of fact with which the biologists, the geologists and the physicists bombarded them. Rarely have controversialists chosen

their ground so unwisely. Rarely has there been such a humbling of spiritual pride.

And then, mysteriously, about the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the tide began, or so it seemed, to turn. Murmuring round cathedral cloisters, rustling through clerical closes, the whisper of the returning waters began to be heard; materialism, it was understood, was breaking down in the very quarters that had given it birth. There was, for example, the theory of Relativity; there was the Quantum Theory; there was the mysteriously jumping electron; there was Heisenberg's principle of Indeterminacy; and, presently, there were the philosophical physicists led by Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans, proclaiming that mind was fundamental, the first and foremost thing both in our experience and in the universe, and that matter was its creature. Theologians greeted these developments with delighted acclamation. Science had taken the field as the enemy of religion, and the enemy had at first achieved prodigious success. For years the faithful had been fighting a series of rearguard actions, giving up first one position and then another—the primacy of man's planet in the universe, the primacy of man on his planet, the doctrine of a solid heaven and a fixed earth, the divine inspiration of the text of the Bible, the creation of the world in 4004 B.C., the doctrine of fixed natural types separated by uncrossable gulfs—as the evidence accumulated to build up a picture of the natural world very different from that which the authors of the Bible had painted. And now, it seemed that the enemy was no enemy at all, but a friend in disguise, and that the disguise was being dropped. Twentieth-century physics, it was stated in the books of Sir James Jeans and Sir Arthur Eddington, had revolutionized the nineteenth-century conception of the physical universe, and the revolution, it appeared, was friendly to religion. Science and religion now, the clergy were told, pointed to the same kind of universe and taught, albeit by different methods, the same truths. Science, it was hinted, had even re-established God.

*The Spheres of Science and Religion Contrasted.*

Unfortunately the self-congratulations of the theologians ~~premature~~ premature. As rapidly became apparent, the reaction

against 'atheistical' science had gone too far. But this time it was not the theologians who were chiefly to blame. The fault lay rather with the philosophizing physicists who, going beyond their brief, had been betrayed into confusion of thought. The confusion was between knowledge of the natural and knowledge of what I will venture to call the 'supernatural' world. The natural world is the sphere of science. The methods of science are experiment and verification, and by their means scientists obtain results which enable them to calculate and to predict. The calculations and predictions are of events in the natural world. Thus it is calculated that the attraction between bodies in empty space will vary inversely with the square of the distance between them. It is predicted that  $H_2O$  will always and everywhere make water. In recent years chemists have built up a molecular architecture of immense complexity for carbon compounds, including the natural substances of plants and animals, by processes of theoretical inference from observed facts. Subsequently the Braggs, father and son, developed the technique of X-ray analysis to a point which enabled scientists to confirm by observation the existence of the structures which they had inferred by calculation.

Science, then, by observation and reasoning, by experiment and inference, explores the natural world, determines its basic structure, and endeavours to determine the mode of its working. Essentially the question which it seeks to answer is, 'How does the natural world function?' Essentially its business is the discovery of facts.

The supernatural world is the sphere of religion. The 'method' of religion, if I may use the word 'method' in this connection, is revelation. The authority of religion is based upon revelation in the past and communication through prayer between man and his Creator in the present. Its 'results', if I may again adapt a word of the scientists, consist in a set of propositions which men are asked to believe and in the articles of a code of conduct which they are required to practise. Thus religion informs man of his status and high destiny in the universe; it tells him how he should live in order to realize that destiny; it tells him also what things are good and what bad, where his duty lies, and in what sin consists. Essentially the question which religion seeks to answer

is, 'Why does the universe work as it does?' Essentially its business is the determination of values.

Confusion inevitably arises when these two worlds, the natural and the supernatural are confused, and pronouncements made about the nature of the one by pursuing methods appropriate to the exploration of the other. Thus religion has made pronouncements about the geography and history of the natural world; its features, it has affirmed, are so and so; its history took place thus and thus. Most of these assertions have been disproved by science. When the evidence for the disproof of the assertions of the religious was accumulating in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, science was accounted, and rightly, the enemy of religion, and it was commonly affirmed that science had discredited religion. Erroneously; what science had done was to discredit the statements which religion had inadvisedly made with regard to matters lying outside its proper sphere. In trying to defend these statements, the professional exponents of religion delivered themselves bound hand and foot to the enemy and were not unnaturally made to look foolish. But the essential truths and doctrines of religion remained untouched by the criticisms of science, since the writ of science did not run in the world of which the truths were true and to which the doctrines applied.

*Science Usurps the Functions of Philosophy and Religion.*

During the last fifty years scientists have tended to make the same mistake as the spokesmen of religion made a hundred years ago. As in the nineteenth century priests and parsons trespassed into the territory of science, so to-day scientists trespass into the territory of religion and proceed to make statements about the 'why' of things for which their science gives them no authority. For the concern of science is with 'hows' not with 'whys'. Thus instead of saying 'The physical world is made of matter and works like a machine', the late nineteenth-century physicist said, 'The physical world is the only world; matter is the only form of existence. Therefore everything works like a machine.' Instead of saying 'Life has evolved by traceable stages from simpler forms of material combinations', the late nineteenth-century biologist added—and, indeed, even the contemporary biologist tends to add—'Therefore the origin of life is to be found

exclusively in these simpler forms of material combination'. Instead of saying 'Man has evolved from other forms of life' biologists added—and still add—'Therefore the origin of man, like that of life, is to be found not in a divine purpose or plan, but in the action of the sun upon the primitive material stuff of which his planet is composed'. In other words, science usurped the function of religion and made general statements about the nature and mode of working of the universe as a whole.

Such, in brief, was the position during the first two decades of the present century when materialist science was still in the ascendant. Science aspired to present us with nothing less than a world picture which was such that, if it was true, then the religious world picture must be false. No doubt the scientific picture of the world left a good deal out. Those brought up under its influence were at home in situations that presented problems demanding solutions, but they were ill at ease in spheres such as those of poetry, of art, and of morals which presented no problems in the sense in which a problem is a question demanding an answer. In order not to be embarrassed by a territory to which his method did not apply, the adherent of the universality of scientific technique blandly denied the importance of the territory. Sometimes he even seemed to deny its existence. When forced to recognize it, he dismissed it as a by-product of human fantasy which owned no place in reality.

These failings and omissions were no doubt inconvenient, but, so strong was the evidence for the scientific picture of the world, so far as the evidence went, so exemplary its success in giving an account of the phenomena which fell within its sphere, that it came to be assumed that ultimately the picture that science painted of the world would become all-embracing and the scientific sphere stand revealed as the only sphere.

What the most recent developments in science have done is to make this assumption no longer plausible. What the arguments advanced in this chapter tend to show is that the scientific picture is no longer exhaustive, and, what is more, that it cannot be made exhaustive, and that art and morals and religion can no longer be left out of account. If the scientific picture can find no room for them, then, we must conclude, that picture is a picture only of a part and not of the whole. There must, we shall insist,

be another picture which is in some sense complementary to the first. In sum, while it casts no doubt upon the competence of science within its own sphere, the sphere of the natural world, the recent revolution in the physical sciences has made most of us aware of what we ought always to have known, that the world of science is not the only world, and that science has little or no competence outside its own particular world.

*The Reaction Goes Too Far.*

It is time to bring this discussion to its point by a reference back to the reflection that provoked it, that the acclamation with which certain theologians have greeted the works of Sir Arthur Eddington and Sir James Jeans has been mistimed and ill-judged. If I am right, science and religion belong to two different spheres, and nothing that happens in the sphere of the former ought to affect our judgement in regard to the sphere of the latter, although it can and should affect our judgement as to validity of conclusions legitimately reached in the former, and illegitimately transferred to the latter. Such a transference has taken place during the last half-century. Briefly, the position is as follows. If the claims made by the materialist science of the nineteenth century were valid, it could be validly deduced that religion and all that it stood for were false. What the recent revolution in the physical sciences has done is to remove the grounds for this deduction. It has not shown that the areas which the scientific picture of the world once purported to cover but is now seen not to cover are the areas occupied by religion; it has merely shown that the scientific picture of the world is not all-embracing. It has not proved religion to be true; it has only shown that the reasons which science gave for supposing religion to be false were invalid; invalid, that is to say, in respect of their claim to give science competence in a sphere in which its writ does not run. Thus though the recent revolution in science may have cleared the boards of the universe for the re-entry of religion, it has no contribution to make to the writing of the play.

*What the Argument Does and Does not Show.*

The argument which I have been engaged in following in this chapter illustrates this contention. I have adduced a number of

considerations which purport to rule out as untenable the materialist explanation of *all* that exists in terms of the movements of particles of matter. In addition to matter there must, I have suggested, also be life and/or mind. Life and/or mind must, then, be regarded as independent principles and not merely as functions of or emanations from matter. But though these considerations seem to me to tell convincingly against materialism, they do not tell positively in favour of religion. They leave open the question whether the mind whose existence they affirm is a single divine mind or merely a number of separate individual minds of which human minds are the most outstanding examples. They make no pronouncement on the issue whether life was originally unconscious and has evolved at continually higher levels until it attains that of consciousness, or whether there was a fully conscious mind from the first which expressed itself in or created the lowest forms of life.

Finally, they say nothing as to the question whether mind is immanent in or transcends, or, as is sometimes asserted, is both immanent in and transcends the natural world. Thus while they point to a conclusion which, unlike that of materialist science, is compatible with the religious hypothesis, they offer no positive grounds in favour of that hypothesis. If materialist science were true in respect of all that it asserted, then, as I have said, religion must be false. If the arguments adduced in this chapter are valid, it is possible that religion should be either false or true. Finally if I am right, no considerations derived from the study of science can take us beyond this agnostic position.



## Chapter 5

# GOD AS EMERGENT AND GOD AS CREATED

I propose in this chapter to consider certain current philosophies which, rejecting materialism and accepting mind as an activity separate from and independent of matter, seek to give an account of the universe as a whole in terms of conceptions appropriate to and derived from the natural world. They do not, that is to say, introduce any transcendent or supernatural element when they seek to interpret the phenomena of the natural world, and they do not do so because they deny that any such element exists. In particular they seek, not without considerable success, to make provision for the religious impulse within the boundaries of the purely natural world. These philosophies have been fashionable during the last fifty years, and many of those who reject materialism have found consolation and encouragement in them. For this reason, I propose to include some account of them here. A further reason for their inclusion is to be found in the circumstance that I, like many of my contemporaries, have been powerfully attracted by views of this kind; indeed, I have vigorously maintained them for nearly a quarter of a century. I have a special interest, therefore, in examining the reasons why this type of philosophy no longer contents me. I propose to consider two examples of this attempt to explain and interpret the universe as a whole without introducing any transcendent principle. They are the philosophies known as Emergent and as Creative Evolution.

### I. EMERGENT EVOLUTION

#### *Statement of the View.*

The view known as Emergent Evolution takes note of the fact to which I have already referred, that the process known as

evolution proceeds by the formation of combinations which appear to exhibit properties not present in the combining elements. In this sense, it would seem, the cosmic process is creative. Thus atoms form molecules, molecules crystals; but the properties of the molecule are not those of the atom, nor are the properties of the crystal those of the molecule; non-coloured waves in the electro-magnetic spectrum combine with a non-coloured optic nerve running into the brain to generate colour or, more precisely, the sensation of colour; silver and chlorine combine to produce silver-chloride whose properties are those neither of silver nor of chlorine; oxygen and hydrogen combine to produce water which is wet, although wetness belongs neither to oxygen nor to hydrogen, and so on. The qualities which are found in the compound but not found in the elements are called "emergent qualities", and they are, it is maintained, quite strictly new. They are not, that is to say, wholly analysable in terms of, or wholly subject to, the laws which govern the constituents upon whose combination they emerge, and the most exhaustive examination of the constituents would fail to reveal their presence in them. On the analogy of these facts the supporters of the philosophy of emergent evolution regard life as an emergent property. When life is combined with a suitable bodily structure there emerge, they further maintain, consciousness, mind and personality. This view is distinct from materialism proper in respect of the fact that although it derives consciousness from combinations of material particles, it maintains that, once consciousness has emerged, it has a life of its own which is in part independent of the life of the body, obeys laws other than the laws of physics and chemistry which govern the body, and may even survive the break-up of the combination upon which it has emerged.

### *A Theory of Survival.*

This last contention introduces us to an interesting by-product of the theory about which something must be said. Strictly, it is not consciousness but life which, it is thought, may survive the break-up of the material instrument with which life combines. This variant of emergent evolution is in some ways nearer to the second view to be considered below, the view I have called

Creative Evolution, in the sense that it postulates life as a separate and independent activity there, as it were, from the beginning, and regards only mind as an emergent. Life so conceived is an unconscious dynamic urge without individuality, personality or purpose. It combines, or rather a specifically isolated stream or current of life, sometimes called the 'psychic factor', combines with a body to produce a mind which appears as an emergent characteristic upon the combination. Mind is, therefore, derivative and secondary, while life and matter are given and primary. But once a mind is formed, it achieves a degree of independence from the determining influence of its constituents and is to this extent free. At death the combination is broken up. The body disintegrates, but the 'psychic factor' may continue to exist, at any rate for a time, and to retain its power of combining with the body to form a mind.

Now let us consider the condition of a medium in a trance. What the precise explanation of the mediumistic trance may be we do not know, but, speaking metaphorically, we may say that the mind that normally animates the body of the medium is temporarily in abeyance or, if the phrase be preferred, has temporarily vacated the medium's body. It is with this temporarily vacated body that the surviving psychic factor of the dead person combines to form a new temporary mind. It is this temporary mind which is responsible for sending the so-called spirit messages, and, it may be, for causing the *physical* phenomena which are associated with the séance room. But it goes out of existence so soon as the trance ends and the medium's mind resumes control of his body. Thus though the 'psychic factor' survives, the mind and personality do not.

#### *A Theory of Deity.*

The cosmic process which, in the course of its development, throws up consciousness as an emergent quality may proceed to a further stage and produce God or rather a succession of Gods. For in the universe as theories of evolution conceive it, nothing is stable and fixed; there are no absolutes; there is only the developing cosmic process. Therefore God, once achieved, can be overpassed and transcended by a super God. Such a view has indeed been explicitly advocated in Professor Alexander's great

work *Space, Time and Deity*. Deity, he held, was an unrealized ideal, representing the level of evolution yet to be reached, and perpetually stimulating life at the level already reached to rise above itself by performing the office of goal or ideal to life at the already-realized level. Once achieved, deity ceases to be ideal and becomes actual, but the realization of deity only brings a further conception of deity over the horizon of man's consciousness, in the shape of life to be realized at a yet higher level which, in its turn, performs the office of ideal to the level which had just been actualized. Deity, then, never is but always is to be. This view, if the metaphor is to be pardoned—it so exactly expresses the conception which Alexander had in mind—visualizes deity after the model of the carrot which dangles in front of the nose of the donkey to stimulate his forward march, with the modification that as each successive carrot is reached and absorbed, another springs up to take its place. God, then, is perpetually in the making, being made by man as man reaches forward towards ever higher levels of conscious life.

On this view, God is an extension of the same evolving cosmic process as that to which man belongs. Man's consciousness is simply an earlier instalment of the same process; life an earlier instalment still. While each stage of the cosmic development is continuous with the preceding, it is only through the effort of the preceding stage that the succeeding is brought into being. Some go farther and conceive of each existing level of the evolutionary process as being subject to an obligation, which, however, never amounts to compulsion, to transcend itself. Thus man has a moral duty to develop in such a way as to engender God. This he does by pursuing the highest in the way of thought and conduct which he is capable of conceiving, thus preparing the way for the emergence of a Being higher than himself who, hitherto existing only in man's conception, is actualized by man's effort to transcend himself.

### *Criticism of Theories of Emergent Evolution.*

What can be said against this view?

(1) The first objection raises technical issues which I cannot here do more than indicate. I have already, as part of the criticism of materialism, stated rather than argued the proposition

that you cannot by a combination of factors, none of which possess a certain quality, conjure up a product which possesses it; that you cannot, for example, from non-coloured particles produce colour, or from non-living substances life. It seems to me that the doctrine just stated offends against this principle. I can understand that life may be potentially present in the particles of matter from the first; that conscious mind may be potentially present in the initial forms of unconscious life; even, perhaps, that God may be potentially present in the highest forms of human consciousness. If this is so, evolution is simply a process of making explicit the implications of what already exists.

But this is not what the doctrine asserts. It is anxious to claim real creativity on the part of the constituents that come into combination, real novelty for the product which emerges from their combination. But if creativity is to be admitted in the universe, we might as well drop the language and concepts of science and pronounce wholeheartedly for an independent creative force of life, or even for a creative God. For if there is real creativity, if what emerges is *really* new, then the emergent qualities are not contained in, and not determined by that which went before. The constituents from which the new qualities emerge are, then, nothing to the emerged product, since the product, not being contained in the constituents and not being determined by the constituents, might just as well have emerged from some other combination of constituents. That non-caused and, therefore, non-predictable events occur in the universe may be true, but it is a truth of which science can give no account and with which its methods are inappropriate to deal. To admit that there are such truths is to admit by implication that there are areas of existence to which science does not apply. Now the truth that the theory of emergence seeks to establish is a truth of precisely this kind. Why, then, seek to bring it under the formulae appropriate to the description of scientific processes in order to provide an appearance of scientific explanation? To say that there is emergence is to say that events occur which are not wholly determined by and do not wholly spring from the conditions precedent to the event? Very possibly! But let us not, then, omit to make provision for an ineradicably creative element in the universe. Religion can accept, nay it demands, such an element

and has developed modes of language and thought for describing it and fitting it into a coherent cosmic scheme. Science is unable to deal with it, and if it feels constrained to admit its existence, had better let it alone.

Of course, the doctrine does not acknowledge these, to my mind, necessary entailments. Accepting the emergent quality as new, it nevertheless regards it as in some sense produced by what went before. But if it is in fact produced, then it is not a true novelty, and the doctrine must give up its distinctive claim.

(2) *The Doom of the Emergent God.* At the time when the doctrine of emergence was being widely advocated, materialist science was still paramount. Under its influence men believed that the universe was bound by an iron determinism which accounted for every event as the necessary result of its prior cause. This determinism embraced the human mind. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the doctrine of emergent evolution appeared as in some sense an answer to materialism, it contained one implication which, one would have thought, was fatal to a theological view of the universe, and the fact that, like the more recent work of the philosophical physicists, it was welcomed by theologians is, I am afraid, evidence only of the degree of discouragement which led them to grasp at so deceitful a straw. For the willingness of theologians to acclaim any and every doctrine which seemed hostile to materialism, affords melancholy testimony to the desperate straits to which the success of materialism has reduced them. It also affords testimony to their inability to see beyond the ends of their dialectical noses. It is almost as if, after doing battle with the materialists, they had said, 'Any enemy rather than this one.' This eagerness to make use of any stick which seemed likely to be serviceable for the beating of so formidable a foe has blinded the orthodox to the fact that this particular weapon was, if I may mix my metaphors, double-edged. The presence of the dangerous edge quickly becomes manifest, if we examine some of the implications of emergence.

If everything is by the nature of its being in a continual state of evolutionary development, then there is nothing which is exempt from development. There are, therefore, no elements of permanence or stability in the universe and there is no enduring or unchanging God. God, in so far as He can be affirmed at all,

is wholly immanent. He is latent in the natural world and is, therefore, a part of it, changing as it changes, evolving as it evolves. Such in effect is the upshot of Bergson's philosophy, with its demonstration that everything that exists or can exist is and must be in a state of change; that the universe, in fact, is a creative flow, and that man is part of that flow. I have already referred to an analogous conception of the world put forward by Professor Alexander in his book *Space, Time and Deity*. His universe too is a developing one, evolving from unconsciousness to consciousness; evolving also, as it develops, ever fuller instalments of deity. I referred also to Alexander's conception of God as the goal of the evolutionary process, a goal to which it continually aspires and continually seeks to realize but which as continuously recedes, for, since God is also part of the evolving universe, the goal evolves together with the process which seeks to realize it.

And therefore? Therefore, Alexander's God, like Bergson's God, like in fact all immanent evolving Gods who are conceived as part of the same process of development as the universe that makes them, must share the universe's fate. That fate, if the second law of Thermo-Dynamics is to be trusted, is to achieve a condition of eventless stagnation. All energy will be evenly distributed and the universe will come to rest in a uniform glow of cosmic radiation. As with the universe, so with God; He will cease to exist as the universe which has evolved him ceases to develop. Whether He be conceived as the next stage of the evolutionary process, performing the office of ideal to be achieved or goal to be pursued by the stage already reached, or as the highest level of conscious spirit that ultimately emerges from all the levels and combinations of levels that have preceded Him, He must, it is obvious, cease to be with the conditions which gave Him birth. Beyond the end of evolution there is no next stage; when the process of emergence ceases, nothing further can emerge.

Such a view may be true, but it is not inspiring, nor can a God so conceived evoke the sentiments proper to religion. He is certainly not the creator of the world; nor is he the loving father of us all participating in, yet apart from the sufferings of his creatures, whom theologians have affirmed.

But can we accept it as true? One of the main grounds for the

religious hypothesis is the existence in man of the religious emotions—reverence, awe, the sense of mystery, the desire to worship. These, I know, can be explained away, but as I shall try to show,<sup>1</sup> such explanations are inadequate. If, then, the question be asked, why should not the God whom the universe has created die with the universe which gave Him birth, the answer is, because such a God is not an adequate object for the religious emotions. If, in short, the emergent God is the only God, then the religious emotions remain arbitrary and unexplained.

(3) *The Triviality of the Emergent Universe.* This objection leads to a third, an objection of sentiment rather than logic. The concept of the emergent God is, I suggest, indictable on the ground of what I can only call its narrow humanism. It leaves out too much; value—for there is nothing outside ourselves worthy of man's reverence; worship and awe—for there is nothing in the universe that man has not made; permanence and eternity—for there is nothing in the universe that does not change. The religious view of the universe has been accused of anthropomorphism; conceiving God in man's image it has endowed Him, so we are told, with man's nature, with his nature and his failings. No doubt there is much in this charge, and many of the claims which the religions of the world have put forward are, it must be admitted, a testimony less to the nature of the universe than to the conceit of man. But the conceit involved in the traditional view is as nothing compared with the aggrandisement of the human spirit implied by the philosophy of emergence. For the emergent God is not only imaginatively conceived by man's spirit, He is actively made by man's efforts. Not only are His attributes the products of our conception, not only are His virtues and values the projection of our aspirations, but His reality is our gift. Thus man is in very truth the measure of all things. This exaltation of man is a common characteristic of most of the philosophies that have appeared since the Renaissance.

In a forgotten book called *Speculations* which appeared in the early twenties, the late Mr. T. E. Hulme made use of the phrase the Critique of Satisfaction to indicate the distinctive significance of this common characteristic. He points out that the great

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 6, pp. 215-219.



majority of the philosophies which have appeared since the Renaissance, however they may differ on other points—and admittedly they do differ enormously—nevertheless closely resemble each other in one respect. Diverse as are the pictures of the universe which these philosophies present to us, they are all *satisfactory and satisfactory in the same way*; that is to say, their conceptions of man's relation to the world all conform to the same standards or canons of what is satisfying. It is in the similarity of these canons that the unity of most post-Renaissance philosophies is to be found. The canons of satisfaction which determine the final picture of the world in which the philosophy issues are unconscious; they represent, that is to say, an implied view of what is a *satisfactory* destiny for man, which is the unconscious intellectual heritage of most modern thinkers. Hence, though the *truth* of any particular philosophy may be questioned by a rival school, its conception of what is satisfactory is tacitly agreed to. This unconscious canon of satisfaction receives its most concise formulation in Goethe's famous answer to Eckermann's remark that human thought and action seem to repeat themselves by going round in a circle. 'No, it is not a circle; it is a spiral,' said Goethe. This, as Mr. Hulme comments, is to 'disguise the wheel by making it run up an inclined plane'; and, since the ascent affirmed is limitless and is yet an ascent to nothing, it is tantamount to regarding perfection as expressible in terms of the ascent itself, that is, in terms of the advance of human nature. Notable expressions of this doctrine are Croce's mystery of the infinite progress and infinite perfectibility of man, and Professor Alexander's conception of deity as a perpetually unrealized quality of the evolutionary process of which we ourselves form part.

*The Metaphysic of Man Triumphant.*

I do not know that I have any positive argument to produce against philosophies which are dominated by the Critique of Satisfaction. I can only say that I find them profoundly unsatisfying. In particular, I am sensible of a certain triviality in a view which admits the existence of nothing outside the human to serve as a measure of value or as an object for reverence. It is a view which accorded well enough with the days of man's power, that

is to say, with the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the progress of mechanical invention had enormously increased man's command over nature. His power was greater than it had ever been in the past, nor could any definite limits be set to its further increase. Reflecting this increase in power was a habit of mind which believed that nothing was too high for man's achieving. This belief was fostered by the doctrine of evolution. As a result, the early years of the twentieth century were characterized by a self-confidence and pride of life which recalls in some respects the spirit of the Renaissance. This spirit finds in such doctrines as those to which I have referred its most appropriate philosophical expression. The inventor, the financier, the business man, the successful man of action generally find in the philosophy of a developing universe in which nothing is other than, or alien from, the human, and in which, therefore, there is no bar to human expansion, an expression of their instinctive view of the world. Such men, accustomed to a world malleable to their wishes, to the world of the market, the counting house, the factory and the stock exchange, have difficulty in believing that the universe is not merely a larger edition of the world to which they are accustomed. Philosophies of evolution appeal, then, to the temper of mind which finds on the surface of this planet adequate sustenance for its imagination and satisfaction for its spirit. In so far as it recognizes the existence of religion, it desires it, as it desires modern conveniences, to assist in transacting the affairs of this world, not as providing impersonal objects for satisfying man's hunger for perfection, or a God to whom he can abase himself in self-surrender and in awe.

To us, man no longer seems so powerful; it is true that his power to command the physical universe still grows, but it is not, as we have learnt to our cost, accompanied by a growth in his power to command himself. There are times, indeed, when his control over himself seems to have diminished *pari passu* with the increase of his control over matter. A possible reason for his failure in self-mastery may, we are realizing, be the presence in the universe of elements and forces other than those of which, in the days of his material triumphs, he was willing to take account. In the wake of this realization comes another. Is it any longer

satisfactory, I ask myself, in the light of my new-born conviction of the pervasiveness and ineradicability of human evil, to accommodate one's ideas of value within the framework of the concepts of man's own ultimate development. If in the light of recent events value can no longer be equated with the indefinite extension of what is *valuable in us*, perfection can be equated still less.

*Man's New-Found Humility.*

These considerations have made men more inclined to recognize the possibility of the existence of non-human values and forces in the universe which, standing outside the process which we know as evolution, afford standards by means of which it can be measured, while remaining themselves unaffected by the process which they measure. To define the possibility more precisely, we are led to ask whether there may not be an element of permanence and perfection in the universe which is in some sense at once the goal of our efforts and the object of our aspirations? With the question there comes the reflection that there was something a little trivial about a world view which was prepared not only to accept man as the centre of the universe, but to conceive of the universe as somehow *there* merely for the purpose of putting man in its centre. Perpetually to appraise the universe from the point of view of its ability to embody human ideals or to guarantee the fulfilment of human aspirations, is by assimilating it to the human to destroy the very value with which it was sought to endow it.

*The Essence of a Religious Metaphysic.*

For my part, I have come to feel that the chief glory of the human mind lies in its ability to comprehend the nature of what is other than itself, and not only other, but vaster and more valuable. That the sense of impotence which attends the realization of the vastness of the external space-world, a vastness in which no flicker of the human is anywhere apparent, is mitigated by the very fact that minds should have been able to discover and to explore it, is a reflection made commonplace by the number of those who, following Pascal, have been impressed by it. But logic and mathematics take us into an alien world of a different kind, a world imposing by virtue not of size but of

necessity. It is a world ruled by laws such that not only itself but all possible worlds must conform to them, so that, contemplating it, the mind is ennobled and enriched by its realization of a necessity foreign to itself. This world of necessity is the dwelling-place of truth; it is also touched by beauty. To know it, is to know what is nobler than ourselves. To discover that the universe contains a value to which, though we may contemplate it, we ourselves can never aspire, is surely a more exhilarating experience than to suppose that it contains only such poor values as those with which our minds can endow it. To discern in the world which the human spirit explores the presence of values such as truth and beauty, while recognizing at the same time their entire independence of ourselves, is to view them in their proper perspective. Such a view brings the realization that it is only when they are purged of every element of the human that the values can be adequate goals of human endeavour. At the same time the mind achieves nobility from its capacity to be swayed by reverence for that into which there enters no element of self.

This is the attitude which underlies the great religions of the past. All deeply religious views of the world have borne witness to the presence in the universe of a non-human element of perfection and eternity, which affords a standard by which the human is seen to be faulty and the changing to be inadequate. To this element religion advocates submission in thought. To assimilate this element to ourselves, to regard it as sensitive to our wishes and responsive to our hopes, as akin to our spirit and ultimately continuous with our nature, is to degrade it to our level. So degraded, it is bereft of precisely that character of value in virtue of which it can inspire our wishes and awaken our hopes. That an anthropomorphically conceived deity is a degraded deity is matter of agreement; what is not so generally recognized is that an anthropomorphic conception of value, postulating values which, although not made in man's image, are continuous with the best in his nature, suffers from a degradation no less profound because less easily discerned.

The same criticism may be offered of those philosophies of evolution which substitute for a value which is an idealized version of the human spirit, a goal which is brought to birth by

human striving. An end which is conceived as a higher emergent level of the same stream of life as that to which we ourselves belong is an unsatisfying end; modelled to fit human aspirations, constrained by the necessity of satisfying them, it is disabled by the circumstances which generated and shaped it from providing the satisfaction for which it is invoked. This criticism applies in an especial degree to the notion of a God whom our own aspirations have brought into being. If God is indeed, as Emergent Evolution suggests, the goal of evolution, He must be outside, not part of its stream; He must be independent of the process which seeks to achieve Him, and not a phase of that process.

*Summary.* To summarize the foregoing objections to the philosophy of Emergent Evolution, I have urged

(a) That it robs the world of interest and grandeur by finding in it no object for man's reverence or worship except an infinitely improved version of himself. This is to narrow the universe and render it trivial.

(b) This consideration would not be an argument so much as an expression of distaste, were it not for the fact that man's nature has a side which expresses itself in emotions of reverence and awe, for which a universe wholly subject to evolutionary development fails to make provision, and which must therefore, on this view, be accepted as arbitrary facts. Religion provides for these emotions by suggesting that the universe contains an object which is other than and outside the process of life, and other than human consciousness, or any possible extension of human consciousness, to which the appropriate response of the human spirit is reverence, love and adoration. If the emergent view is true, these emotions are hopelessly misleading, since they are emotions felt for nothing. Hence the most important intimations of the religious experience—the sense of given-ness, of dependence on a reality other than ourselves, above all the feeling of grace, which, religion tells us, is the recognition and response of man's spirit to the help and healing that the reality bestows,—seeing that after all there is no such reality, would need to be written off as mere subjective illusions arising one knows not whence, explicable one knows not how.

(c) The emergent universe turns out on examination to be the result of a subtle process of anthropomorphism. Revolting against

the older religious view which insisted that at the heart of things there must be God conceived in man's image and specially interested in his concerns, it has nevertheless succeeded in making man not less but more important in the scheme of things, by insisting that he is at once the maker of the universe, the measure of its value, and the hope of its future. For us, standing as we do on the verge of the breakdown of another civilization and looking back upon the ruin of that phase of progress which made the emergent God plausible, it is difficult to regard ourselves with that complacency, or the universe with that frivolity which the acceptance of the notion of emergent evolution entailed.

## II. CREATIVE EVOLUTION

### *Antecedents of Creative Evolution.*

I can most conveniently refer to the other view which I wish next to consider under the title 'Creative Evolution'. It is a view which has never assumed either a definite or an authoritative form, being indeed a complex of theories advanced by different thinkers in the early part of this century between which there runs a family likeness, rather than a single coherent philosophy. I use the word 'theories' when 'tendencies' would perhaps be more appropriate, the philosophy of Creative Evolution being in origin a development of, and a set of deductions from, certain tendencies which were at one time fashionable in biological science. For this development and these deductions Samuel Butler, Bernard Shaw and Henri Bergson have all been in different degrees responsible. Bergson is, I suppose, the best accredited exponent of the view as a whole.

I was myself for many years an upholder of Creative Evolution, and I still think that, if the religious hypothesis is to be excluded, it covers more of the evidence which is available for interpretation and covers it more plausibly than any rival hypothesis. In this conviction I have sought to provide the complex of tendencies to which I have referred with a metaphysical foundation, and to present it in an academic philosophical form. The result of these endeavours is a book entitled *Matter, Life and Value* which I published in 1929.

*The View Stated.*

Let us suppose that we reject materialism, and to account for the life, mind and consciousness, which we find ourselves unable to resolve into or derive from matter, invoke the operations of an active independent principle of life.

Let us suppose, further, that we are not prepared to regard this principle as an emergent upon exclusively material constituents. Granted these assumptions and suppositions, we must postulate for our principle a separate origin and independent being. It will then be, for us, one of the initially-given cosmic counters with which the speculative game of universe construction is to be played. Matter must be accepted as another such counter, since, for the reasons given on an earlier page<sup>1</sup>, it still seems to me impossible, as it has always done, to explain the workings of the universe in terms of the operation of a single principle, or its composition in terms of a single unitary substance.

Into the material universe behaving exclusively in accordance with the laws of physics, this principle of life was, I conceived, smuggled at a definite moment, or series of moments in history. Or perhaps it smuggled itself, or perhaps it was present in it from the first.

(The adoption of one of these alternatives rather than another does not affect the argument at the moment, which is concerned only to insist upon life's independence of matter.)

This principle interacts with and animates the stuff of the physical universe, using and moulding it to its purpose as the fingers of a skilled pianist use the keys of his instrument, or those of a potter mould his clay. In effect, it associates with matter—the phrase which obviously suggests itself, 'it enters into matter', can only be used in a Pickwickian sense because of its spatial implications—to form the bodies of living organisms.

A living organism, then, is a piece of matter temporarily animated by a current of life—the electrical metaphor, though necessarily misleading, is perhaps slightly less so than any other which makes use of the terms and concepts appropriate to the world of matter, if only because electricity lacks the connotation of the word 'stuff'. Why does it form organisms? I answered, in pursuance of its purpose; for I conceived that life, initially uncon-

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 106-108.

scious, a mere blind, instinctive urge, in the course of its development gradually acquired the property of consciousness, and as part of consciousness, purposiveness. (I should have liked to have said that it was purposive, even in its initial unconscious phase, and that, with consciousness, it attained a consciousness of the purpose that it had always had. I should have liked, I say, to have put it that way, but the notion of unconscious purpose has always seemed to me to be a contradiction in terms.)

In order to facilitate its development in pursuance of its purpose, it creates the various species of living organisms. A living organism is, therefore, an instrument of life, designed to give conscious expression to life's instinctive purpose.

From these metaphysical principles there derived an ethical creed. The living organism had, I conceived, a duty to the 'Life Force' (for at this point in the argument life, the animating principle of the universe, assumed a degree of importance which justified the employment of the capital letter), namely, to raise Life as expressed in itself to a higher level of development than that at which it had received it. This it did by exercising its inborn capacities, refining its faculties and acquiring knowledge and accomplishments; in short, it achieved a higher<sup>1</sup> level of life by nurturing the talents which life in the raw had bestowed upon it.

In order to perform this service, in order, that is to say, to be good soldiers in the cause of life, it was incumbent upon us to live out to the full extent of all our energies, eschewing slackness both of mind and body, and keeping our faculties screwed up to concert pitch through constant exercise, at the highest level of which they were capable.

The moral code that resulted was a code of effort and endeavour. We were never to adopt the line of least resistance, never to relax, but always to do the difficult or the dangerous thing in order that in and through our efforts the evolutionary process might advance to higher levels.

#### *Recognition of the Need for an Independent Goal.*

The advantage of this view which constituted at the same time its point of departure from other similar views, lay not so much

<sup>1</sup> The sense in which the word "higher" is used is explained below (see pp. 162, 163).



in its recognition that evolution was a purposive process—this was common ground to most of the evolutionary philosophies of the time—as in its realization that the end of the process must lie outside and beyond the movement that sought to realize it.

The general tendency of those who adopted evolutionary philosophies was to regard the object of life's development as being somehow part of, in the sense of being potential in, life itself. For example, the emergent evolutionists regarded the purpose of life as consisting simply in the development of life at a higher level. Others, among whom was Shaw, represented the purpose of life as the achievement of a great force and intensity of conscious awareness. Apart from what I have called above 'the narrow humanism' of this view, it seemed to me to involve a simple logical fallacy. Forms of life which were later in point of time one could understand; they presented no problem. But forms of life which were *higher in point of level, better in terms of quality, or, more simply, farther advanced*—what could such conceptions mean in a universe in which there was nothing but life, and in which, therefore, there were no standards of value other than and external to life by means of which to measure life's advance? 'Better' and 'higher' were measuring terms and measurement implied a standard which was other than what it measured, and by reference to which alone measurement could be undertaken. You could not, after all, measure the length of a roll of cloth unless there were a tape measure marked out in yards and feet by reference to which your measurement could be made. You could not measure a ruler by itself. To try to do so, one would like to add, would be as if a man were to try to lift himself by his own braces. 'Higher life', 'better life', 'better quality life'—all these expressions postulated conceptions of 'height', or 'betterment' and postulated, therefore, standards of value which were outside the process to the measurement of which they were applied and by reference to which the development of the process could be estimated.

*That Consciousness Entails an Object.*

A similar difficulty beset the conception of greater intensity of conscious awareness. How, after all, does one differentiate the consciousness of a slug from that of a dog, or of a dog from that of a man? The dog, most people would be inclined to say, is

more aware than the slug, the man more aware than the dog. But 'awareness' introduces the notion of a something of which there is awareness which is other than the awareness of it. The dog is aware of more things than the slug and is aware of different things; the man, again, of more things and of different things as compared with the dog. The man can do mathematics, for example, which means that he can be aware of numbers and of the relations which subsist between them. The truth is that consciousness by itself is a blank. Consciousness always entails a relation to an object of which there is consciousness, and without that object it is nothing. Once this is realized, it will be seen that we cannot meaningfully postulate higher powers or levels of consciousness without reference to something other than consciousness, namely, to that upon which the higher powers of consciousness are directed. For since consciousness is always of something, it must be by reference to the nature of that of which the consciousness is conscious, that the level of consciousness which has been reached can be estimated. My conclusion was that the conception of higher planes of consciousness reveals itself as meaning consciousness directed upon, aware of, or able to comprehend objects of greater depth, refinement, rarity, value—I am deliberately using non-committal expressions—than consciousness on a lower plane. .

Applying this conclusion to the preceding discussion, we may say that the notion of advance and the notion, therefore, of higher levels of life to which there is advance is meaningless, unless there is postulated the presence in the universe of standards of value and objects of consciousness which are outside the evolutionary process which advances towards them. The point is an obvious one and it is only the frequency with which it is overlooked which justifies me in illustrating it by examples. I will take two, each of which illustrates a current fallacy; the first, the current fallacy of progress, the second, the current fallacy of relativity. (I do not, of course, mean that progress and the theory of relativity are fallacies; I am referring only to current misconceptions as to their nature.)

### *The Fallacy of Progress.*

For many years it was believed that something called 'progress' occurred in human affairs. The belief was, indeed, general

among the Victorians and still survives among the old. Now progress by its very nature involves not only movement, but movement in a certain direction and the notion of direction entails that of goal. Thus, if I place myself in the Strand and set my legs in motion, there is change, or if the expression is preferred, there is process. But unless I know whether I want to go to Charing Cross or to Temple Bar, it is meaningless to ask whether I am progressing or not. Progress, then, involves a goal which is other than and outside the movement which seeks to achieve it. Now one of the main sources of confusion in the modern world is to be found in the lack of agreement as to the nature of the goal either for society or for the individual. Is there to be more law or less? More liberty or less? Is the individual to be regarded merely as a cell in the body politic whose ultimate destiny is to be wholly merged in the social organism, as the ant is merged in the life of the termitary, or is he an immortal soul, possessing rights and powers that owe nothing to the State, whose true purpose is to realize his personality in this world and to achieve salvation in the next? Is the object of existence the maximum of happiness in this world, or the discipline of the soul in preparation for salvation in the next? All these, which are questions of ultimate goals, are examples of the kind of question in regard to which our contemporaries differ most. Yet until they are settled, it is obviously meaningless to ask whether modern society or modern man is progressing, or not.

### *The Fallacy of Relativity.*

The theory of mathematical relativity has led people to maintain that everything is relative and, therefore, that values are relative. Thus beauty, they say, is in the eye of the beholder and there is nothing good or bad but thinking makes it so. The questions raised by this assertion of the relativity, or as it is sometimes called, the subjectivity of values, have a vital bearing on the thesis of this book, and I shall return to them in the next chapter.<sup>1</sup> I am here concerned only to insist that to say that values are relative is tantamount to saying that they are meaningless. It may very well be the case that they *are* meaningless, but it is important to point out that this and nothing less is entailed by the

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 6, pp. 188-207.

assertion that there is no goodness or beauty outside the changing opinions and valuations which occur in the consciousnesses of different men and women. That this is so may, I think, be shown by my second example which I take from the mystical philosopher Plinlimmon in Herman Melville's *Pierre*. Plinlimmon is discussing the nature of time, or rather of our knowledge of time.

In order that we may know time, he points out, two things are necessary. First, a standard of absolute time, in fact, a Greenwich time, to serve as a point of reference; and secondly, a knowledge of the meridian of longitude on which one happens to be situated. To be given abstract Greenwich time without knowing one's meridian, by reference to which one can correlate one's own relation to Greenwich time in terms of hours and minutes, is useless. Ideals and values, in other words, are not enough. But a local time which has no point of reference other than that supplied by its own watches, which knows nothing of Greenwich and makes no astronomical observations is meaningless, for how can those who have only such local time know whether their watches are fast or slow? The only possible standard in such a case is that supplied by the highest common denominator of all the watches in the community. Time, then, if it is to be exact, still more if it is to be measured, demands an absolute point of reference to which it can be referred, and that point of reference must be outside and beyond the process of time which is referred to it.

To apply the moral of these examples, it has always seemed to me that no purely evolutionary theory of the universe can succeed in filling the cosmic bill. At least, it cannot do so if the notion of progress, of purpose, of betterment, or of value is to be included in the evolutionary process.

### *The Need for Goals and Standards.*

For progress implies a goal other than the movement which progresses towards it, purpose an end other than the efforts which are made to realize it, betterment a standard other than the process whose improvement the standard measures, valuation an absolute value by reference to their approximation to which the worth of the actions, characters, societies, and states of mind under valuation can be assessed. The logical course for those

who believe only in an evolving universe without ultimates or standards is to refrain from valuing or condemning; they should be content to notice that changes occur without seeking to appraise them. From time to time such a declaration of intention is made, yet in the very next sentence we find those who make it introducing by the back door the very conceptions that they have thrust so ceremoniously out of the front, implying, for example, that kindness is better than cruelty and justice than injustice, that the savage is higher than the amoeba and the civilized man than the savage, that it is better to understand the criminal than to punish him, and that a society which sends a boy to a reformatory for stealing is better than one which sends him to the gallows; that knowledge is a good and that an educated community is, therefore, more desirable than an uneducated one; that a Mozart quartet is better than a chorus of cats; that it is right to say that 2 and 2 make 4 and wrong to say that they make 5, and that a philosophy which *refrains* from introducing absolute standards of values represents a closer approximation to the nature of things and is, therefore, truer than one which is still cluttered with these figments of the scholastic imagination. In these ways and in a hundred others, supporters of the view that is under criticism do persistently suggest that some things are better, higher, truer, more beautiful, more civilized, more moral, more edifying than others, and that civilization progresses in so far as it embodies or realizes or approximates to or brings forth a greater number of these better, higher, truer, more beautiful, more civilized, more moral, or more edifying things. And they make this suggestion, because they cannot help themselves. Granted, then, the necessity under which we all labour of making judgements of moral and aesthetic import, I do not see with what logic we can avoid the implications of our necessity by seeking to deny the existence in the universe of certain absolute standards and values in terms of which alone our moral and aesthetic judgements have meaning and content. These standards and values cannot, as I have tried to show, be part of the process which they are invoked to measure. Therefore, they are outside it; therefore, in addition to life and its manifestations whose law is change, there are, I have always maintained, elements of enduring permanence in the

universe of whose presence life is intermittently and obscurely aware.

*The Purpose of Life.*

As a creative evolutionist, then, I conceived that the purpose of life was so to evolve that these permanent elements in the universe, permanent and, as I have liked to think, perfect, which at present dimly and indirectly perceived through the medium of their representations in paint and sound—for it was, I held, the value, beauty, which conferred upon the works of art which manifested it, the characteristics in virtue of which they excited and thrilled us—might become clearly and directly apprehended by the most highly developed forms of consciousness. Thus the standard by which I sought to appraise different levels of Life, saying that one was higher than another, was that of their ability to apprehend value and the manifestations of value. I came to think of matter as something which intervened between Life and value, and was thus induced to represent Life as labouring under the necessity of first objectifying itself in matter, in order that it might achieve such a level of conscious awareness as would enable it to transcend matter and concentrate its consciousness wholly upon value. The expression of this necessity was to be seen in the creation of living organisms, which were the manifestations of Life in matter.

Thus there were three independent realities in my universe, Life, matter and value, and the purpose of Life as objectified in matter was, I conceived, to develop through matter until it had passed beyond matter to the awareness of value. This metaphysic was set out at length in my book entitled *Matter, Life and Value*.

*The Provision for Deity in Dr. Julian Huxley's Universe.*

The notion of value will occupy the next chapter and I shall not further develop it here. My purpose here has been to sketch the doctrine of Creative Evolution in the form in which for a considerable time I maintained it. This is natural enough. It is natural, that is to say, to be more familiar with one's own views, even with one's own partially discarded views than with those of others; but it would be misleading to allow the foregoing to

stand as an example of a typical Creative Evolutionist theory. From the orthodox evolutionary point of view it is vitiated by its admission of a permanent and perfect element in the universe which stands outside the evolutionary process and may be regarded as its bourn. It was precisely this admission, though I was unaware of it at the time, which constituted the weak point in the armour of my philosophy, the point through which a flood of ideas, more appropriate to the religious view of the universe than to that triumphant mood of early twentieth-century evolutionary philosophy in which I was nurtured, was later to force its entrance.

The typical view regarded both value and God, as the emergent evolutionists regarded them,<sup>1</sup> as later instalments of the same creative process as had produced man; instalments which were brought into being by the efforts of the earlier instalments. God, in short, according to what I may call the official evolutionist view, was created by man. For a good example of such a view I refer the reader to a book by Dr. Julian Huxley<sup>2</sup> entitled *Religion without Revelation*, in which he identifies God with the external forces of the universe, both material and spiritual, in interaction with man's religious sense. God, on this view, is a by-product of man's reaction to the forces outside him, is, in short, the function of a complex. Here is a quotation from a recent article entitled *Science and Religion* by Julian Huxley in which this view is summarized:

'This complex is not just the forces of nature: nor is it only the sum of human ideas and moral laws. It is both of these, but it is these only as felt and organized by the human personality as a whole. . . . Man's tendency to organize his knowledge and his feelings, his desire for understanding and for propitiation, his ideals of virtue, his complementary instincts for self-assertion and self-abasement—these and much else enter into the reaction of his mind to the external complex of forces; and finally, it is

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 148, 149.

<sup>2</sup> I do not, of course, wish to suggest that Dr. Huxley is an advocate of creative-evolutionist theories as described in the text. I cite his view merely in illustration of the kind of provision which must be made for the religious emotions in a universe which is regarded as evolutionary through and through.

his capacity for experiencing things as sacred which makes the reaction a religious one. Under the influence of our all but incurable tendency to project our own personality into the world around us, to personify impersonal forces and abstract ideals, religion has endowed this X or God with personality or super-personality.'

Thus Huxley's God is a product of the personifying tendency of the human mind reacting to the environment which stimulates it.

'God, like science, say, or art,' Huxley goes on, 'becomes a product of evolving humanity and must evolve with it.'

All the difficulties arising from the traditional theological conception of God fall away, he insists, if we realize that

'God, in the sense in which I have used the term, is made by man, not man created by God.'

I shall comment on this view later in another connection.<sup>1</sup> My present concern is merely to cite it as an illustrative example of the kind of provision which is made for the religious sense and the sense of values in a purely evolutionary metaphysic. So far as criticism is here concerned, I content myself with pointing out that it is indictable on the same charge of 'narrow humanism' as that which has already been brought against the serial Gods of the emergent evolutionary scheme.

### *Objections to the View of the Universe Sponsored by Creative Evolution.*

I turn now to an account of the reasons which, as the years have passed, have led me to regard the kind of universe affirmed by the philosophy of creative evolution as increasingly unsatisfactory. Of these reasons I propose to mention four which have a special relevance to the theme of this book. They are objections more particularly to the special variant of the doctrine of creative evolution which I for many years sought to maintain and which I have summarized in this chapter.

#### *(1) Arbitrariness of the Scheme.*

There is a certain arbitrariness about the three elements affirmed as basic in the universe. Here were three distinct and separate bricks with which, as it were, I proposed to set about the business of building the cosmos. Why three? It is, of course,

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 6, pp. 222-225.



conceivable that there are three basic elements in the universe which just *are*, or rather, which just happen to be lying about, waiting for an evolutionary universe to form itself from their co-operation or interaction. It is, I say, conceivable, but it seems to me to be increasingly unplausible. To postulate a unity of which the three separately affirmed elements were expressions or aspects would be plausible. The unity of a single Creator using these as the basic elements from which to construct, or the basic instruments with which to construct His universe would be an obvious example of such a unity. But to postulate the existence of such a unity, especially in the form of a Creator, would have been to go most of the way with the theistic hypothesis, and that, for the reasons given in the second and third chapters of this book, I was not prepared to do. But these three arbitrarily given and juxtaposed elements owning no common source, aspects of no more fundamental unity, have come in course of time to seem to me less plausible even than the theistic hypothesis.

(2) *The Difficulty of Purpose.*

I had conceived that life, originally unconscious, gradually evolved the quality of consciousness in the process of its own development. If originally unconscious, it was originally without purpose, since the notion of an unconscious purpose, a purpose that is to say not entertained by any consciousness, is, for me, as I have pointed out, a contradiction in terms. That the originally unpurposing should become purposive now seems to me in the highest degree unlikely. Indeed, I am not sure that the emergence of the quality of purposiveness in the originally unpurposing would not be an example of the generation from a combination of elements of a property not possessed by any one of them, which I have already declared to be impossible.<sup>1</sup> In so far as emergence is taken to entail such generation, I should deny that emergence occurs.

It would seem, then, that life must have been purposive from the beginning. But let us suppose that it was not; that it was initially purposeless. Then, not being imbued with *any* purpose, it could not have been imbued with the purpose to become purposive. Therefore its achievement of purposiveness must

<sup>1</sup> See the argument in Chapter 4, pp. 129, 130.

have been an accident; therefore, the whole process of purposive evolution, which I conceived as a process seeking to evolve ever higher qualities and powers of consciousness in order that life might ultimately achieve contemplation of the world of value, was an accidental process. It might just as well not have happened. But if the world, as we know it, is a chance world, why postulate this elaborate machinery of life, matter and value? For if the world is a chance world, then the materialist conception of a universe consisting of one kind of basic constituent, namely, particles of matter in motion, is much more plausible, since it postulates only one kind of reality, and does not seek to endow that reality with purpose.

Apart from this, I cannot any longer believe that the process which we call evolution is a chance process. (I must not, it is obvious, lay any stress upon this last consideration. The fact that I cannot believe it, may mean no more than that I now do not wish to believe it.)

The conclusion to which these considerations point is that life must have been purposive to begin with. But purposiveness entails a mind or intelligence to conceive the purpose. Either, then, mind and intelligence were properties which belonged to life from the outset, or an intelligence created life in pursuance of *its* purpose. But to postulate a purposive intelligence as a preliminary to getting the process of evolution started is, once again, to go more than half-way to meet the theistic hypothesis.

### (3) *The Difficulty of Interaction.*

A third difficulty was that of interaction. When matter, as the result of its development in accordance with the laws of physics and chemistry had reached a suitable state of receptiveness, life, as I had supposed, entered into it, animated it, and proceeded to mould and use it in pursuance of its purpose. (I am putting it crudely in the interests of brevity. I did not in fact make use of such naïve, spatial metaphors.) Life then, though initially separate from and independent of matter, at a certain stage of matter's development entered into and interacted with matter.

And, be it here noted, there seemed no alternative to postulating this interaction. If one rejected materialism (as I did),

rejected, therefore, the view that life is a mere by-product of or emanation from matter, if one rejected idealism (as I did) and rejected, therefore, the view that matter was an illusion bred of the limitations of the human mind, if one rejected theism (as I then did), and was precluded, therefore, from postulating a God to make it in the first instance and then to breathe the breath of life into it, what alternative was there to holding that life and matter were separate principles, which were in constant interaction and which reciprocally influenced each other? Yet the more I learnt of psychology, the more I extended my very smattering acquaintance with physiology, the more difficult did this conception of interaction become. Life was immaterial; it possessed neither weight, mass, size, nor position in space. It was, I conceived, free and was not, therefore, obedient to the laws of chemistry and physics. Matter was material; to it belonged all those properties which life lacked. Moreover, it was bound by the laws of physics and chemistry. How then, the problem arose, could two such disparate entities possibly make contact with each other?

The question is one which I have extensively discussed in other books.<sup>1</sup> The discussions have led always to the same answer which, putting it bluntly, is that we do not know. So overwhelming did the advantages of regarding both mind and body as separate though interacting principles appear to me to be, that for many years I was content to accept the answer 'We do not know', while suggesting at the same time that with the advance of science we might one day be able to throw some light on what must for the present remain a mystery. It is only of recent years that I have come to realize that not only do we not know how mind and body interact, but that by following the methods of science, we can never come to know. To say this, I now see, is a way of saying that the mystery of mind-body interactions is not merely a by-product of our too little knowledge, but belongs to the very nature of things. Not only do we not know, it is impossible that as scientists we ever shall know how mind and body interact; yet apparently they do interact. This, it may be said, is mere mystery-mongering. Whether it is so or not, depends upon what is meant by 'a mystery'. A thing may be a

<sup>1</sup> See in particular my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XVIII.

mystery in the sense that it is not and cannot be explained or understood by the methods of science, yet no mystery at all, if methods other than those of science are admitted as valid.

Suppose, for example, that mind and body were two different aspects of a single whole or unity which transcends both. Whether, following Hegel, one conceived of that unity as a unity of knowledge, a whole within which both subject and object fell, or, following Spinoza, as God, it was clear both that the language used by these philosophers was unintelligible to science and that the unity affirmed was unreachable by its methods. Yet it was precisely such a unity that a well-known modern philosophy, by which I was considerably influenced, a philosophy which, basing itself upon recent developments in science, had, nevertheless, exposed its limitations, had affirmed. This was the philosophy of Whitehead, who had sought to show that the fundamental nature of reality was that of a process, and that both mind and body, regarded as separate and distinct entities, were but arbitrarily conceived congelations of the process.

Again, there was the double aspect theory in psychology, according to which both mind and body were aspects of a reality which was more fundamental than either, but in regard to the nature of which, since it was neither mental nor material, no positive affirmation could be made. By putting the mind-body problem in a new setting, these views made the apparent interaction between the two at least conceivable, but the setting was no longer the setting of science. Granted, however, that one was to go beyond science and invoke some non-scientific form of explanation, why not—the same question again presented itself—go all the way with the theistic hypothesis? I had always been anxious to maintain the uniqueness and integrity both of mind and of body and careful not to infringe the separate and distinctive reality of either. It was for this reason that the various theories which envisaged each as a different aspect of a fundamental unity, had never seemed to me to be wholly satisfactory. They entailed, if I may so put it, too great a degree of assimilation between the fundamentally disparate.

The metaphysical view that had seemed to me to be on general grounds most closely in accord with the facts of experience was

that of Cartesian dualism. Mind and body, according to this view, were two distinct and independent reals; they did not interact and owned no causal relationship with each other, but God had so arranged matters that every event in the one was accompanied by a corresponding event in the other. Thus when I *felt* hungry my mouth opened and my body absorbed food; when my body required warmth, I *decided* to light a fire, and so on. This psycho-physical parallelism, as it was called, disposed of the difficulties of interactionism by invoking the continual intervention of the Creator. This solution had always seemed to me, as it has seemed to most modern philosophers, to be so fantastic as to rule out of court the dualistic theory which demanded it. But was it, I now began to ask myself, so very fantastic after all? If one were prepared to accept the theistic hypothesis, there would be nothing fantastic about it.

But once one had admitted the necessity of transcending purely scientific modes of explanation, I could not see that there was any good ground for excluding the theistic hypothesis. If the natural world did not—and Whitehead had convinced me that it did not—contain its explanation within itself, then one must look for the ground of its explanation in a world other than the natural world, and what could such a world be but a supernatural world? I do not mean that I am accepting Descartes's explanation of the apparent interaction between mind and body. Once the possibility of divine control or even of divine intervention is admitted, it is obviously absurd to try to prescribe the mode of its operation, for, if there is God, then to God all things are possible. The Bible says that God breathed the breath of life into clay. Whatever mode of connection between God, the life, and the clay, the metaphor indicates, it would, I think, from the very nature of the case be one which we could not understand. Thus the advantage of invoking the theistic hypothesis at this stage is that it permits us to postulate, it even justifies us in postulating, a form of connection which may well defy, which, if I am right, *must* defy, our understanding.

Let me try to sum up the position at which I had now arrived in a series of steps.

(i) It seemed to me certain that mind and body either interacted or behaved in all respects as if they interacted.

(ii) If they were really as different as they seemed to be, such interaction seemed inexplicable by the methods of science.

(iii) I was convinced that their difference was real and not illusory.

(iv) Therefore it seemed to be necessary to go beyond the methods of science.

(v) Once it was accepted that non-natural modes of explanation and connection could be justifiably invoked, then the theistic hypothesis began to seem plausible; (a) because it enabled one to maintain the separateness and individual integrity both of mind and of body; (b) because, from the very nature of the case, the demand for an understanding of the mode of connection which it entailed could not be satisfied.

(4) *The Moral Difficulty.* (a) *The Lack of Provision for Evil.*

I have left this to the last not because it constitutes the most cogent objection to the philosophy which I had so long endeavoured to maintain, but because it was the most potent cause of my abandonment of it. Its importance in the development of my own thought has been biographical rather than logical. Three matters are relevant here, all of which are connected with morals and all of which seem to require a universe which is capable of being interpreted morally. Upon the first—my growing conviction of the reality of evil—I have already dwelt. If evil is a by-product of circumstance, the result of imperfect development or inadequate training, then it may be supposed that it will disappear when development is complete and training perfect. In a creative evolutionary world, therefore, evil would disappear at a certain stage of life's development, as for example, when life came to rest, as I had supposed that it might do, in contemplation of or identity with the permanent values of the universe. But if evil is, as I have now come to believe, a positive brute fact, rooted in the heart of things, and not, therefore, to be eliminated or even wholly overcome, what provision was to be made for it in a universe such as creative evolution envisaged? Was evil, perhaps, a form of *disvalue*, real and eternal, existing, as it were, side by side with the values truth, goodness and beauty, whose presence in the universe I had postulated, and constituting, as it were, a pole for man's avoidance as they

constituted goals for his endeavour? Such a view was, I supposed, possible, but if it was correct, the universe is both queerer and more arbitrarily queer than anyone has ever supposed. It is a universe which contains truth, goodness, beauty, life, matter and evil, existing side by side as separate and independent principles without unity, connection or common origin.

But if we reject this conclusion as in the highest degree unpalatable, the question remains, what account are we on the evolutionary hypothesis to give of evil? I have already insisted that a universe which consists simply of an evolutionary life process cannot generate the standards by which its progress must be measured, or the ends which constitute the goal of its advance.

But if it cannot generate an absolute principle of good it cannot, granted the validity of the preceding argument, generate an absolute principle of evil. It can only produce such semblance or appearance of evil as is manifested by inadequate or tardy development. In other words, the only evil which it is capable of explaining is the evil that can be written off as a by-product of circumstance. Now this view of evil, the view that evil is a by-product of circumstance, I had already decided to be inadequate. Thus the circumstances which had first forced upon my attention the positive, given character of the fact of evil also threw into relief the inadequacy of the philosophy which had hitherto served to explain the fact, or so much of the fact as I was prepared to admit.

*The Moral Difficulty. (b) The Fact of Moral Experience.*

The second ground for dissatisfaction lay in my growing awareness of the fact and significance of moral experience; by moral experience I mean our recognition of the imperative character of the concept of 'ought' as it appears in the familiar opposition, 'I want to do this, but I ought to do that'. I do not wish to imply that it is only those who have little acquaintance with moral experience who can find in the conception of a perpetually evolving universe, whether conceived on creative or emergent lines, an adequate explanation of the world. To do so would be a gratuitous impertinence. But, speaking for myself, I cannot refrain from making the point that it was only for so long as I myself remained a comparative stranger to

moral experience, that such a universe appeared to me to be tolerable.

*Excursus into Autobiography.*

I cannot do justice to this point without an excursus into autobiography, which I undertake for purposes of illustration only, and shall make as brief as is consistent with those purposes. As a young man, I was for many years practically innocent of the experience of the opposition to which I have referred. I do not mean that I *never* wanted to do the things that I ought not to have done, or that other people thought I ought not to have done; merely that I never or very rarely wanted to do things that I *personally thought* I ought not to have done. This meant that the conflict between duty and desire rarely, if ever, presented itself to me, and that I was a stranger to the experience of temptation. If I wanted to do something, I did it without feeling of guilt; if I wanted to possess something and could take it without risk, I took it without question.

The preceding sentence would suggest that I was completely a-moral. The suggestion, however, would be unjust. I was imbued by a hatred of meanness and cruelty, and I had a resentment of injustice and a respect for truth. I also recognized certain obligations, the obligation to keep my faculties tuned up to concert pitch, my body vigorous and strong, my mind clear and keen. I recognized that in order to maintain my physical and intellectual being in this condition, a certain amount of discipline, even of denial, was necessary. I must not be slack; I must not take the line of least resistance; I must react against fear; I must take risks; I must choose the difficult rather than the easy thing, take the harder route up the mountain, go the longer way round, essay the more difficult book, make the speech on the big occasion, write three and not two pages before I left to catch the train, never permit myself an idle five minutes, and so on . . .

This obligation to keep myself in good mental and physical training was the nearest approach to moral experience that I knew. If I had been asked the question, 'training for what?' I should have said, training to enable me to get the most out of life, since I believed that it was only those whose native propensities had been sharpened by discipline and exercise and



whose faculties were kept continuously at full stretch, who could put the most into and get the most out of the arduous pursuits of full and varied living.

*The Temptation of Gluttony.*

One of my besetting sins was—indeed, it still is—that of gluttony. I have always found it difficult to resist the temptation of good food. I am interested in all questions pertaining to food, and have developed what I like to believe is a palate. Let food be good in quality, well-cooked, properly served, and sedulously varied, and down go my defences and I gourmandize my way through all the intricacies of a delicious meal. Now this disposition of mine has always conflicted with my ideal of the faculties kept at cutting edge. Not only did over-eating produce a distended paunch, an unwieldy body and an overworked digestion; not only did it cloud the faculties, dull the spirit, blur the vision and lay me flat on my bed to sleep through the languid hours that followed the heavy lunch; it made me stupid in mind, loutish in behaviour and irritable and acidulous in temper.

Here, then, was a field of conflict between the desire for rich and varied eating and the distaste for its consequences. Over-eating became for me a temptation, not because I thought it was wrong in itself, but because it led to consequences which militated against vigour, and lowered vitality; which clouded one's faculties and reduced one's happiness. I emphasize the fact that this temptation, the temptation of second helpings, really *was* a temptation. When I fought against it and overcame it, I experienced a definite strengthening of moral character and elevation of moral tone—in my more critical moments I called this feeling of being strengthened and elevated, not I think always justly, moral complacency; when I fought against it and succumbed, or did not fight at all, I was conscious of a weakening of moral fibre coupled with the unwelcome knowledge that I should find it more difficult to resist next time. And it was in fact more difficult to resist next time.

My disposition was to regard this experience of moral conflict as a thing not wholly regrettable. Indeed, I could find it in my heart to be grateful for it. It gave me, I used to boast, a shaft of insight into the nature of the Victorians. I have always been

a great admirer of Victorian novels, of Dickens and Thackeray and the Brontës, of Trollope and George Eliot, particularly of Trollope and George Eliot; yet their field of interest and experience was, I could not help but realize, alien to my own. For the issues upon which their novels turned were primarily moral issues. Man's soul was represented as the battle ground of a conflict upon which the forces of good and evil struggled perpetually for the mastery. Continually men and women were beset by temptation; they overcame it and were strengthened in character; or they yielded and fell into sin. As the novel proceeded, the overcomers became increasingly distinguished from the yielders, the sheep increasingly separated from the goats; the strugglers became stronger, the yielders habitually more yielding. Now this sort of thing, I was apt to remark, was 'all Greek' to me—or rather, it would have been, had it not been for the merciful circumstance of my own temptation to gluttony. For this, I was apt to explain, gave me a needed angle upon the moral experience of Victorians, enabling me to appreciate the issues to which they attached so much importance and enlarging my enjoyment of their novels by giving me some insight, however indirect, into the trials and temptations of their characters.

*The Author's Disclaimer of Virtue.*

On reading through the foregoing, I seem to have confessed myself by implication into most of the cardinal virtues.

I am, I suggest, a hater of injustice and cruelty and therefore, it must be presumed, a champion of the oppressed and a defender of the weak. I am a seeker after truth, a seeker, it is to be supposed, after truth without fear or favour. I am also given to self-discipline and to an energetic furtherance of what I conceive to be the evolutionary purpose. There was, of course, that unfortunate tendency to greediness, but, for the rest I was not, one might suppose, a bad average specimen of mankind. So, at least, I would seem to have implied.

No such self-portrait could be farther from my intention, and I hasten to correct the impression of complacency which I have inadvertently conveyed. It is true that on the whole I was kindly and good-tempered, but that was only because in the easy circumstances of my life I was rarely crossed. If I gave evidence of

a certain large good will which led me to devote myself to causes which aimed at the amelioration of the lot of my less fortunate fellows, it was the approval of my neighbours and perhaps of myself, rather than the welfare of mankind that I sought. Moreover, I was a good speaker and public work fed the flames of the complacency with the applause which my many appearances upon the platform brought me. In a word, I appeared disinterested and I was eloquent, and both circumstances contributed to raise my position in my own and the public's estimation.

But though pervaded by a vague humanitarianism in public, in private I was selfish, possessive and predatory. When they conflicted, I was never prepared to sacrifice my interests to those of other people, nor does my memory embrace many occasions on which I seriously put myself out to aid my fellows. It does, however, remind me that, when occasion arose, I could be as malicious and as cruel as the best—or rather, the worst—of them. There were certain virtues, chastity and humility, for example, to which I was an almost complete stranger. There were vices—but these, since this book is not after all a confessional, I take leave to refrain from describing—with which I was all too familiar.

### *His Admission of Shamelessness.*

For these vices I felt no shame. It was easy for me to say, as I have said above, that I never, or very rarely, wanted to do the things that I thought I ought not to do, for the fact of the matter was that there was very little that I thought that I ought not to do, and if I did that little, if, in other words, I was vicious according to my own conception of viciousness, I had little consciousness of sin and less of remorse. I suppose that my besetting sin was unscrupulousness. Habitually I used people not as ends, but as means to my ends. But the recognition that I was unscrupulous—and I freely made it—did not, so far as I can remember, give me more than a moment's uncasiness.

The Greek philosophers, especially the Stoics, regarded the sense of shame which the good man felt at doing what was base as the indispensable foundation of the moral life. Of all men, the shameless man seemed to them to be the most reprehensible; a man, they considered, might well do wrong, but he should at

least have the grace to admit the fact in his own consciousness and to be sorry for it. If he had *no* consciousness of wrongdoing, then he was guilty of what Plato called the 'lie in the soul'. Now I was, I think, shameless in precisely this sense, and being shameless, I was (except only and always for my special temptation to gluttony) without moral experience. I was also without religious experience. I did not know whether God existed; on the whole I thought He probably did not, but I did not much care whether He existed or not. I felt that I was making a very good job of my life as it was, and all I asked of God was to be let alone. No doubt I had done those things which I ought not to have done and left undone those things which I ought to have done, but, like Samuel Butler, 'I was very well, thank you!' Why, then, should I concern myself with God, or God with me? Why, above all, should He call upon me to repent? For what should I repent? I did not, after all, set out to be good, and I was certainly not attracted by the bribe of salvation. Goodness was easy for God, since God was perfect, but why should He expect me to excel in a sphere in which I had no ambitions? Goodness, in fact, was God's business and not mine. I had made no pretensions to it and was content to make none.

### *His Absorption in the Intellectual Life.*

I am conscious that this excursion into autobiography has already overstepped the function of illustration for which purpose it was originally introduced, and has entered the realm of self-confession. Having overstepped the limits which separate the legitimate exposition of argument from the illegitimate indulgence in autobiographical reminiscence, I cannot resist the temptation of further indulgence in the shape of a word of self-extenuation. Anxious to avoid the charge of complacency, I seem now to have confessed myself worse than I was, representing myself not so much as a contemner of, as a stranger to moral experience. As a stranger to moral experience, I was, I suppose, a pretty bad man. Very possibly, but for years I was also a comparatively happy, bad man. Moreover, my neglect of the sphere of moral, was qualified—I will not say compensated—by an absorption in the sphere of intellectual experience, an absorption which constituted, I hope, some partial justification for the moral poverty

of which it was the partial cause. I lived intensely the life of the mind, was in love with ideas, believed that the highest aim of man was to enlarge the little sphere of understanding in which his mind was set, and held it my duty to further this aim as far as in me lay. Having learnt from Aristotle that reason was the distinguishing characteristic of man, I followed his teaching to the extent of supposing that in the exercise of reason lay the most fitting, because the most distinctively human, activity. In that exercise I did not spare myself; indeed I mortified the intellectual flesh to the point of asceticism, holding whatever time was not given to reading or writing to be time lost, and playing games, walking, riding, and relaxing only in order, as I liked to believe, to keep myself in trim for those intellectual ardours and endurances to which I conceived that I had dedicated my energies.

I despised and fought against slackness in all its forms, for I was sufficiently imbued with Greek ideals to believe that the exercise of the body was the indispensable condition of the fruitful functioning of the mind. Thus my gospel was one of effort and endeavour; efforts at all levels, endeavour in all forms, both for their own sake and because by effort and endeavour I kept my mind fresh and my faculties tuned up to concert pitch.

Living a disciplined intellectual life in the interest of intellectual good, I felt myself entitled to pass lightly over the moral life and moral good. I devoted myself so continuously to the task of keeping intellect up to the scratch, that I did not see why I should deny myself the indulgence of my emotions and desires when such indulgence did not interfere with intellectual activity, or take the cutting edge off intellectual competence. On the contrary, I had come to believe that a certain indulgence of the senses was a condition of the effective exercise of the mind. The solicitation of sexual desire, for example, if not adequately provided for, was for me rather like a mosquito buzzing in a room in which one was trying to write. . . .

And so if I had considered the matter of morals one way or the other—and it is part of my contention here that I considered it very little—I should have said that morality was for me a department of the intellectual life; that moral excellence was ancillary to intellectual excellence; and that the only justification for disciplining the senses and restricting the passions was to be found

in the fuller experience of the mind. For the rest, the only way to get rid of a temptation was to yield to it, and it was important not to be harassed by temptation.

But though intellectual activity supplied for many years the place of moral experience, it was very far from *being* moral experience. Though it imposed its own obligations and prescribed its own disciplines, they were not moral obligations and not moral disciplines. I had an intellectual, even upon occasion an aesthetic angle upon life, but scarcely, if at all, did I view it from a moral standpoint. I saw things as beautiful and ugly, people as intelligent or stupid, ideas as intriguing or commonplace. Rarely did I see them as good or bad. Since morality played so little part in my life, it was unnecessary to make outstanding provision for it in my philosophy. Since I did not interpret my experience morally, why should I introduce morality into my interpretation of the universe? And thus it came about that the doctrines which in this chapter I have been engaged in describing seemed to me, as they seemed to many of my contemporaries, to be tolerable in respect of their provision for moral experience, tenable in spite of the meagreness of that provision.

*His Realization of the Significance of Moral Experience.*

I have, I hope, in the early part of this book, sufficiently made plain how the problem of evil has thrust itself with a new insistence into the mind of my generation. The problem of evil raises in an acute form the issue of morality, for in saying that something is evil, one is saying among other things that it *ought* not to exist, or *ought* not to be done. Partly because of the general deterioration in the moral climate of the time, partly perhaps as the result of a development in myself that in retrospect wears an air of inevitability, questions of right and wrong, of good and bad, have come, for me, to assume an immensely greater significance. I have seen that the times are wicked, and I have seen that I myself am wicked; I have come, in other words, to have what is called a sense of sin. Into all the reasons for and the nature of this personal change I do not wish here to enter. It is sufficient for my purpose to mention that the fact of temptation to which I was for many years a stranger, now confronts me with growing frequency and force. Many of the things that I do now, I feel

that I ought not to do, feel it so strongly that I can enter wholeheartedly into Saint Paul's confession of the good I would that I do not, and of the evil that I would not that I do, and instead of echoing Samuel Butler's jibe, am more inclined to following the Prayer Book in deducing from my innumerable commissions and omissions, not that 'I am very well, thank you!' but that 'I am a miserable sinner'.

These experiences are in a sense a reversion to normality. They are the experiences which have been familiar to mankind throughout the last two thousand years. To them Christianity attaches an immense significance. They are, indeed, at once the ground for the Christian interpretation of life and the justification for the Christian doctrines about life.

Moral experience is not, I think, so common as it was. The twentieth century, as compared with the nineteenth, has attached comparatively little importance to the word 'ought', and my philosophy students tend to show an impatience with ethics as raising problems which are unworthy of a serious person's attention. I have little doubt that this greater infrequency of moral experience is bound up with the decline of Christian belief, whether as cause or as effect I do not here consider. For me at any rate, moral experience is more common than it was. In fact, from occurring with such infrequency as to lead me to doubt whether it ever certainly occurred at all or whether, if it did, it had any significance save such as the view that it was a rationalization of the sense of guilt urged upon me by psycho-analysis would have been content to attribute to it, it has now become an almost daily part of the texture of my life. In the light of it, much that was meaningless in theological writings, much that was incomprehensible in the lives of good men, much that was absurd in the typical nineteenth-century novel, has become meaningful, understandable and serious.

Now this newly realized insistence of the fact of evil, this newly felt significance of moral experience, could not, it was obvious, be without their effect upon one's interpretation of the nature of a universe in which evil was a fact and moral experience occurred. I do not wish to suggest, as many have done, that the concepts of morality are sufficient for such interpretation; that the universe can be interpreted *exclusively* in moral terms, in

terms, for example, of a struggle between good and evil, or between God and the Devil, or as a perpetual effort by God to reclaim the souls of those who perversely insist on getting themselves damned, but I am at least clear that they cannot be left out of the cosmic account. If the universe has any meaning that we can understand, then what we understand by moral experience and moral conflict must be part of that meaning. That some things are good and some bad, and that, being tempted to pursue the bad we yet have a duty to overcome our temptation and to cleave to the good—these things, I think, are facts and for them some provision must be made in our cosmic scheme.

Now the doctrines of emergent and creative evolution made no such provision; or rather, to be fair—for the blank 'no' does them an injustice—made no adequate provision. I have already commented on the fact that the doctrine of emergent evolution admits no absolute values in its universe. It followed that, for it, there was no absolute standard by reference to which to measure and appraise good and to condemn evil. Good, on this view, must be simply that which one happens to like, or which most people happen to like, or which the governing class of one's society happens to like. I was dissatisfied with such subjectivist interpretations of good. I have given reasons for this dissatisfaction elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> reasons to which I recur in the next chapter.

It is true that the doctrine of creative evolution in the form in which I held and have sketched it above was not necessarily committed to subjectivism, for it entailed the existence in the universe of certain absolute ends which I conceived as goodness, truth and beauty, the complete apprehension of which constituted, as I conceived, the goal of life's evolutionary development. These ends were permanent, and perfect, and while their complete realization by life lay in a future infinitely remote, manifestations of them occurred in the world in and through which life evolved. The picture only imperfectly manifested beauty, but the beauty which it manifested was absolute. The character of the good man was only an approximate realization of good, but the goodness that shone through it was a perfect goodness.

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*, Chapter IX.



*The Moral Difficulty. (c) Inadequate Basis for Duty in a Creative Evolutionary Universe.*

Thus far and to this extent there was provision in the universe of creative evolution for moral experience. But—and here I come to my third ground of dissatisfaction—was there ground for moral conflict? Every human being was, on the view that I had always held, an individualized expression of a universal force of life, contrived by it as an instrument for the furtherance of its own development. I could write, therefore, of the duty which was laid upon each one of us to go about life's business instead of indulging himself in a selfish attention to his own. But apart from the difficulties relating to free-will which this exhortation brought in its train—for how, it might be asked, if we were only and wholly expressions of life, could we concern ourselves with any business other than that of life; whence could we derive the strength, whence the vital energy to attend to our own, assuming that the expression 'our own' had any meaning, even if we wanted to?—there were the questions, how could such a duty arise and what was the sanction for the obligation to perform it.

The stream goes downhill and follows the conformation of its banks; it has no alternative. The shadow follows its owner; it can do no other. Was our relation as individualized expressions of life to the Life Force which we expressed an equally determined relation? Obviously it was not. How, then, were we to conceive it? As that of a current of water temporarily separated from the main stream by a line of rocks which run athwart its course? The analogy was useful because the current possesses a direction of its own which is other than that of the main stream. But given that it had a direction of its own which it could follow at will, in what sense could it be said to have a *duty* to return to the main stream? If, indeed, I have a mind and will of my own, why should I not develop it on my own lines and as I please? What power or title has the Life Force to call me back? Admittedly there is a stream of instincts and impulses which constantly springs up within me, not only not with the consent of my will, but often in opposition to my will; but this stream has certainly no title to hold me back. On the contrary, I have the strongest possible

instinct which tells me that it is my business to learn to control and discipline my impulses and instincts, and that I can only freely develop and freely become myself when I have done so. It is my duty, in other words, to canalize the stream. The teaching of Plato had at least convinced me on this point.

Here, then, was the difficulty. In so far as I was able to derive an ethic from the philosophy of the Life Force, it seemed to be in direct contradiction to what I must now call the intimations of my moral consciousness, telling me to indulge the impulses and follow the promptings which I share with the animals, and to forget the will and the reason which I possess by virtue of being a man and develop by virtue of living in a society of men. If there was moral conflict here, it was a conflict in which the antagonists had significantly changed sides. For the rest, there was only the obligation to keep myself fresh and vigorous, my faculties at cutting edge, my powers stretched to capacity in life's service.

That we have a duty not to be slack and self-indulgent is true, but what ground after all could one find for this duty on the basis of a Life Force metaphysic? Why had we a duty to assist life? What were the basis and the sanction of this duty? What would happen to us if we failed in it? How would life keep us up to the scratch or punish us, if we fell below it? We could no doubt be credited with feeling a kind of loyalty to life in the sense in which a regiment of soldiers may feel loyalty to its leader, but this surely was not enough to account for the formidable fact of moral conflict which had loomed so large in the experience of mankind for two thousand years, or to set going that terrific apparatus of moral machinery whose creakings had sounded so loudly in the ears of struggling men and women. Thus it was in the last resort because of their poverty on the moral, and I think I must now add, on the religious side, because in particular of their failure to account for what had impressed itself upon me as an ever more formidable fact, the fact, namely, of moral experience and moral conflict, that I was led finally to discard as inadequate the philosophies of creative and emergent evolution.

## Chapter 6

# AN EXAMINATION OF SOME ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN RELIGION AWAY

### STATEMENT OF SUBJECTIVE THEORIES

**T**he arguments of the last chapter sought to establish two conclusions: first, that something other than and outside the process of the developing forms of life known as evolution, is needed to render our experience of the universe intelligible; secondly, that since that experience is in part moral, the 'something other' must contain the ground for the possibility of moral experience; or, more directly, the universe must be at least in part a moral one in the sense of containing the principles of good and evil, right and wrong. These conclusions were reached in the course of a criticism of current evolutionary views of the universe. In the present chapter I propose to consider certain other views, which have achieved widespread currency in the modern world and which are hostile to religion. They are hostile, because they endeavour to explain away this 'something other' and to explain away, therefore, the moral principle which, I am suggesting, is a part of the 'something other', on subjectivist lines, as being a projection of or an emanation from human consciousness.

#### *Definition of 'Subjective' and 'Subjectivism'.*

The words 'Subjective' and 'Subjectivism' are used loosely and in many different senses. It is important, therefore, that I should try to say in what sense I propose to use them here.

Every judgement that is made involves a subject and an object. The subject judges, the object is that which is judged or is judged about. Thus, if I say 'It rained on Tuesday of last week', I am the subject, the occurrence of rain on a particular day

last week is the object. In some judgements the *object* of the judgement is the self who makes it, the judgement being one that asserts that the self is undergoing certain experiences. Thus if I say 'I have the toothache', 'I dread the dentist', 'I am looking forward to my holiday', my judgement asserts that I am having certain experiences, namely, the experiences of pain, of fear, and of pleasurable expectation. When the object judged about is the subject who judges, when, that is to say, the judgement asserts that the subject is having such and such an experience or entertaining such and such an opinion, I propose to call the judgement a 'subjective judgement'.

This is simple enough, but there are complications. The first complication arises from the fact that many judgements which are objective in form turn out on examination to be apparently subjective in fact. Pre-eminent in this class are so-called judgements of taste. Thus if I say 'These gooseberries are sweet' and you say 'These gooseberries are sour', most people would, I think, agree on reflection that neither judgement is in fact a judgement about the gooseberries to which it *appears* to refer, but that each judgement is about a set of sensations occurring in the experience of the person judging, I asserting that I am experiencing a sensation of sweetness when the gooseberries come into contact with my palate, you asserting a sensation of sourness when they come into contact with yours. Thus the two judgements do not, as they appear to do, conflict since they are not two objective judgements about the same object, namely, the gooseberries, one of which asserts that this object has a certain quality, while the other attributes to it the opposite quality; each is about a different object, the one being about certain sensations experienced by me, the other about certain sensations experienced by you. They are, therefore, both subjective. Thus what at first sight appear to be two apparently conflicting objective judgements about the same thing, one of which must be false, if the other is true, turn out on examination to be two non-conflicting subjective judgements about two different things.

While most people would agree that judgements of taste are subjective, they would also agree that there are other judgements which are almost certainly objective. Pre-eminent in the objective class are judgements relating to objects in the spheres of

mathematics and logic. If I say that 3 plus 2 equals 5 and somebody else maintains that 3 plus 2 equals 6, it would be generally agreed that a definite contradiction was involved between two objective judgements about the same thing and that one of these was objective and right and the other objective and wrong. People would not, that is to say, take the view that my judgement asserted merely that I personally held a certain opinion on a certain issue and that somebody else's judgement asserted that he held a different opinion, and that both judgements were, therefore, correct in the sense that the opinion that each of us was asserting that he held was an opinion which he did in fact hold. A schoolboy who took this view, maintaining that the relations between mathematical quantities are purely matters of opinion, and that everybody was entitled to his own, would quickly find out his error to his cost.

Similarly with logical judgements. Everybody would agree that if I judge that it is impossible for a tree both to be and not to be a beech tree, I am making a judgement which reflects not some private prejudice of my own, but asserts a fact about the nature of the world in which we live. Here, then, is a scale at one end of which we may place with reasonable certainty judgements which most people would agree to be clearly subjective (though they may often be objective in form), at the other end judgements which most people would agree to be equally clearly objective. Between these two poles there are categories of judgement whose status is doubtful. Objective in form, they are, many would assert, like judgements of taste in being subjective in fact. But the implications of the assertion that they *are* subjective in fact are very far reaching, and those who on other grounds are convinced that these far-reaching implications are fallacious, are concerned, therefore, to rebut the view that the judgements falling within these categories are subjective.

### *The Status of Aesthetic, Moral and Religious Judgements.*

There are three categories of judgement in regard to which controversy more particularly arises, aesthetic judgements, moral judgements and religious judgements. An example of an aesthetic judgement is 'This picture is beautiful'. The subjectivist translation of it is 'This picture arouses appreciation in' or, more

simply, 'is liked by me'. An example of a moral judgement is 'This is good' or 'This is right'. The subjectivist translation of these judgements is, 'This arouses an emotion of approval in me because it conduces to my advantage or pleasure or convenience'. An example of a religious judgement is 'God exists and is awe-inspiring and worshipful'. The subjectivist translation of it is, 'I enjoy certain emotions and experiences of an awe-inspiring and self-abasing character whose origin I project outside myself and locate in a fictitious object'. In each of these cases a judgement which appears to be about something other than ourselves, asserting that this 'something other' is characterized by a certain quality, the picture by the quality of being beautiful, the action by the quality of being right, the deity by the qualities of being real and being worshipful, is, on the subjectivist interpretation, asserting something quite different, namely, that the person making the judgement is undergoing a certain experience. Hence a consideration of the subjectivist interpretation of the meaning of these judgements is vital to our present discussion because, if this interpretation is correct, then there are no such things as beautiful pictures or right actions; and there is no such being as God—or rather, if there is, we cannot know that there is or make any meaningful statements about Him. The universe, therefore, is devoid of value, and religion is a figment of man's imagination. Moreover, as in the case of judgements of taste (I am using the word 'taste' here to mean the sense of taste) there cannot, given this interpretation of the meaning of aesthetic, moral and religious judgements, be a conflict of judgements. For two persons who judge respectively 'This picture is beautiful', and 'This picture is ugly', will not be passing two different judgements about the same thing, but two judgements about two different things, since when the one says that the picture is beautiful, and the other that it is ugly, all that they will respectively be found to mean is that the one is experiencing certain feelings of appreciation and the other certain feelings of distaste. Thus those who take a subjectivist view of the meaning of aesthetic judgements will often be heard to remark that aesthetic questions are only questions of taste, that there is nothing right or wrong but thinking makes it so, and that the belief in God is only a form of wish-fulfilment. And, indeed, if they are right in their

interpretation of the meaning of these judgements, these implications do in fact follow, since there is no beauty in things which belongs to them independently of our judgements about them and constitutes a criterion by reference to which a false judgement can be distinguished from a true one; there is no absolute standard of right and wrong by reference to which what is *really* good in conduct or in character can be distinguished from what is *really* bad, and there is no Being revealed to and known by us in religious experience who constitutes the object of that experience.

*Some Variations in the Subjectivist View.*

One further complication requires to be mentioned, before I pass to criticism of the subjectivist view. I have hitherto ignored the question, who is the person about whose experience a subjective judgement makes an assertion, or rather, I have assumed that the person referred to is always the person making the judgement. Often this is the case. The kind of subjectivism with which I have hitherto been dealing, the kind, namely, which holds that when I say 'This picture is beautiful', what I mean is that 'I personally happen to appreciate it', may be termed Egoistic Subjectivism. But it may be that it is not about *myself* and *my* feelings of appreciation that I am making an assertion when I say 'This picture is beautiful'; it may be that what I mean is that most people now living appreciate it, or that most people who have ever lived have appreciated it, or that most of those people who are qualified to judge, appreciate it. In the first case, I am invoking the judgement of the age as the criterion of beauty; in the second, the judgement of mankind in all ages; in the third, the judgement of experts or connoisseurs. Similarly with judgements to the effect that so and so is right. Here a further variation suggests itself. Its classical spokesman is Thrasy-machus in Plato's *Republic*; it is developed by Bernard Mandeville in *The Fable of the Bees*, and has been officially adopted by modern Communist theory.

According to this variation, to say 'This is right' means 'This is approved by the governing class of the society which holds it to be right'; approved, because that 'this' should be regarded as right, that, in other words, the particular moral code which 'this' embodies should be observed, is to the advantage of the

governing class and conduces to the retention of its power. 'Justice', as Thrasymachus says at the beginning of Plato's *Republic*, is 'the interest of the stronger'; 'Religion', added Lenin, 'is the opium of the people'. The thought behind both utterances is the same. The governing class makes the law and moulds public opinion in its own interest. The laws made by the governors of a society prescribe what shall be regarded as right and what shall be regarded as wrong; public opinion moulded by press and pulpit and cinema and radio, which are owned by the governors of the society, supports the laws. Therefore, what is thought right and what wrong in a society is identical with what is respectively approved and disapproved of by the governing class—approved and disapproved of, because it conduces to or militates against the maintenance of the position of that class.

Similarly the governing class approves and encourages certain religious beliefs with their correlative codes of value, because the holding of these beliefs and the observing of these codes made the people docile, tractable, dutiful, meek, unworldly, indifferent to their own interests and easily governed. Hence, the currently held religious beliefs of a society, as, for example, the beliefs that God is good and sent His Son into the world to save mankind, or that the rich will enter heaven with difficulty, or not at all, the poor with comparative ease, will be found on analysis to reflect the interests of the governing, that is to say, in a modern society, of the capitalist class. The fact that this is the reason why the beliefs are held does not mean that the reason is consciously realized; members of the capitalist class may themselves sincerely hold them.

All these are examples of the application of the subjectivist theory of judgement, since they interpret the judgement 'X is so and so' to mean that some person or body of persons (not necessarily the person judging) entertains certain opinions in regard to, or experiences certain emotions connected with, or feels a certain approval or disapproval for X.

Subjectivism is no less hostile to religion than is materialism. Materialism denies God because it holds that the world of nature is all, and that the world of nature works like a machine; Subjectivism, because it holds that any judgement of the kind which asserts that God exists, does not in fact succeed in making a statement about God, but asserts something about the wishes and



opinions of the person passing the judgement. Hence, if there is a God we cannot, assuming the subjectivist account of religious judgements to be true, say anything about Him; we cannot in fact refer to Him in any way.

## CRITICISM OF SUBJECTIVIST THEORIES

### I. GENERAL CRITICISM: THAT SUBJECTIVISM CANNOT BE PROVED TRUE

Some of the criticisms to which subjectivism is exposed are common to all its forms, that is to say, to logical, to moral, to aesthetic, and to religious subjectivism. Others apply only to some one or other of the forms which subjectivism assumes. As this is not a text book on philosophy, I shall say little about the general arguments against subjectivism, but confine my criticism to its moral and religious forms. On the question of the general validity of subjectivism, I content myself with one observation. Any argument which seeks to deny that moral and aesthetic judgements can be objective must, if it is successful, establish the fact that logical judgements are also subjective. If the judgement 'This is good' means merely, 'This is thought to be right by me or by most human beings', the judgement 'This is beautiful' means merely, 'This is appreciated by me or by most human beings', then the judgement 'This is true' can mean only, 'This is thought to be true by me or by most human beings'. In other words, there is no such thing as objective truth; there is only what I or most people think to be true. The commonest form of logical subjectivism, pragmatism, asserts that I shall think that to be true which it is convenient for me to think to be true; convenient, because it furthers my purpose so to think it. What you think to be true will be determined by the same consideration. Now what furthers my purpose may not further yours; hence what you think to be true will be the contrary of what I think to be true. Nevertheless, what you think to be true has as good a right to be considered true, as what I think to be true. Thus, there is no objective truth which is independent of either of us; there are only truth claims between which there is no way of deciding (except perhaps by majority vote or force of arms). It follows

that there is no sense in saying that a judgement, an argument, an idea, or a doctrine is true, if, by so describing it, we mean to assert that it corresponds with fact, and corresponds whether we like it or not. Truth, like goodness or beauty, becomes, on this view, simply a matter of opinion.

Let us apply this conclusion to the arguments which are used to support the doctrine which I have called subjectivism. Of these arguments too, it will be meaningless to say either that they are true or that they are untrue. For, if subjectivism is true, the arguments will not succeed in making any pronouncement on the subject to which they purport to relate; they will only succeed in telling us something about the opinions of subjectivists who use them. Thus, if the conclusions which subjectivism asserts are correct, there can be no arguments for them, since the truth both of the argument and of their conclusion must be subjective. Hence, to affirm that subjectivism is true will mean merely that it suits some people, those, namely, who maintain subjectivist views, to believe in it. Indeed, if there is no such thing as objective truth, to say that subjectivism is true cannot mean anything else. In this way it will be seen that any subjectivist theory of judgement tends to cut the ground from under its feet. If it find itself unable to give any real and objective significance to such words as 'goodness' and 'beauty', it must also fail to do so in its application to 'truth'. But if so, it cannot itself be in any significant sense true.

## II. THE SUBJECTIVIST THEORY OF MORALS

### (A) *Relevance of the Discussion of the Subjectivist Theory of Morals to the Religious Hypothesis.*

If there is a God, there must be a moral world; that is to say, a world of which good and evil are real factors, which it should be possible for the human mind to know, and about which it should be possible for it to make judgements. It is not, of course, the case that it is *only* if there is a God that the world can be moral in this sense. God entails a moral world, though a moral world does not entail God, just as sleeping entails breathing although breathing does not entail sleeping. Hence, unless it can be shown that moral judgements can be objective, the religious hypothesis in

its orthodox form must be rejected, although it does not follow that if we can show that moral judgements are objective, the religious hypothesis is thereby established.

That moral judgements are in fact objective and that evil in particular is a real factor in the universe has been several times urged in this book. Thus in the last chapter I adduced as one of the chief reasons for rejecting the creative evolutionary view which I had held for many years, in so far as it purports to provide an exhaustive account of the universe, its inability to make adequate provision for the reality and uniqueness of moral experience. It is, therefore, both important on general grounds and highly relevant to the enquiry with which I am concerned in this book, to try to show that moral judgements can be objective. The subject is complicated and I cannot here go at length into the various issues involved.<sup>1</sup> I do not think, however, that it is difficult to show that moral judgements *can* be objective, in the sense that they *can* refer to principles existing independently of ourselves, and that they do not merely and always report our own prejudices and preferences. The subjectivist theory of moral judgements in its commonest form runs somewhat as follows:

(B) *The Subjectivist Theory of Moral Judgements.*

In the course of man's evolution he formed society. Societies no less than individuals must struggle to maintain their existence. Certain qualities on the part of the members of a society were found to conduce to success in this struggle, courage, for example, and reliability in men, fertility and obedience in women. These qualities were accordingly encouraged; their development became the object of social training and their display was rewarded by communal esteem. One praised a brave man or a fruitful woman because the type of behaviour which they illustrated was useful to the social unit. Thus courage in men and obedience in women came to be regarded as virtues because their practice was useful to society. In course of time the social reasons which led to the general commendation of the qualities of courage and sexual fidelity are forgotten and courage and chastity are esteemed for their own sake. Thus men come to value as right or

<sup>1</sup> I have done so elsewhere. See my *Guide to the Philosophy of Morals and Politics*, Chapters X and XI.

as moral in themselves actions which were originally approved because of their social utility. Some have developed this conclusion on biological lines and have surmised that in later generations there appears an inborn or inherited instinct to approve of that which the earlier generations consciously encouraged for utilitarian reasons. We praise or blame instinctively what our ancestors encouraged or discouraged as the result of a rational calculation. Because of these inherited instincts, we experience a feeling of guilt at the doing of certain actions; we know them to be wrong even when we do not know why they are wrong; we feel guilty even though we have no fear of being discovered. These instincts are inherited versions of our ancestors' condemnation of forms of behaviour which would have injured the community. Thus to say 'This or that is wrong' is not to make an objective judgement about the ethical characteristics of 'this' or 'that'; it is to make a subjective judgement to the effect that I, or my community, or the community from which my community is descended, disapprove or disapproved of it. Now the reasons which led to this disapproval being concerned with matters of survival or convenience are not ethical. Therefore, there is no objective basis for ethics, and good and bad are not real and independent factors in the universe. It is only on this assumption, it is said, that we can explain the bewildering variety of moral judgements that different societies have passed. What is right here is wrong there; what was right then is wrong now. Fires, as Herodotus put it, everywhere burn upward, but man's opinions of good and bad are everywhere different.

'There is hardly a vice or a crime (according to our own moral standard) which has not at some time or other in some circumstances been looked upon as a moral and religious duty,' says Canon Rashdall in his authoritative work *The Theory of Good and Evil*.

It is largely because of this bewildering variety that it has seemed to many people extremely difficult, and to some impossible, to maintain the existence of an objective standard of good and right which human beings can both know and seek to observe. For how comes it, men have asked, that the moral law which men believe themselves to know and which they have tried to observe turns out to be so extremely various in different places and in different

ages, if, indeed, it be one and the same law, independent of all, and binding upon all? If, however, we accept the subjectivist view that moral principles are merely utilitarian precepts in disguise, being in fact nothing more nor less than the inherited versions of rules of tribal expediency, then, it is said, the variety is easily explained. For conduct which is beneficial in one community may easily be harmful in another. Thus a nomadic, semitic tribe living in a hot country requires a high birthrate; the Esquimaux living in a cold climate, where food is difficult to obtain, a low one. In a barbarous community physical strength is important and the refinement of the intellect comparatively unimportant; in a civilized one, brains are more important than brawn, and a tendency when in liquor to beat one's wife is prejudicial to social security. Hence a primitive society condones drunkenness but condemns refinement as softness and looks askance at intelligence. The 'lady', a drug in the market of a primitive, is a feather in the cap of a civilized community. Examples could, it is obvious, be multiplied indefinitely. They point, it is said, to the same conclusion: if the deliverances of the moral sense are determined by considerations of what is useful, then it is only to be expected that they should vary, as 'usefulness' varies.

A variant of the translation of 'the good' into 'the useful' is the translation of 'the good' into 'the efficient'. This translation is commonly made by modern scientists who naturally tend to think in terms of function. A 'good' instrument or appliance of any kind is one that efficiently performs the function for which it was devised. This common-sense notion of 'good' is, they insist, the essential meaning of the term in whatever connection it is used. I quote a modern statement of this view from Dr. Waddington's book *The Scientific Attitude*.

'Goodness is a perfectly ordinary notion which comes into every field of experience, though things which are good in one field may be not so good in another . . . and one may be willing to leave the Absolute and Essential Good to the philosophers, since they, like everyone else, have never been able to get their hands on it. But obviously, in the world of typewriters . . . goodness means a high capacity for carrying out the functions proper to typewriters, namely making a certain set of symbols on paper.

Every biologist who performs experiments with rats knows that a rat is an animal with certain behaviour and functions; a good rat is one in which those functions have been able to develop in their most definite and characteristic form, and conditions are good for rats in proportion as they allow this development to proceed completely and harmoniously, not inhibiting or exaggerating one part at the expense of another.'

The rat illustration introduces us to a further translation of 'good'. The 'good' rat is the one which is the most rat-like in its behaviour; is, therefore, most completely itself. It is 'good', therefore, in the world of living things, to become as completely as possible that which it is intended that one should be, or which it is natural for one's species to be, just as in the world of constructed things it is 'good' that the thing should perform as efficiently as possible the function for which it was intended. The more satisfactorily it does this, the more completely the typewriter is a typewriter, the more completely the rat exhibits the characteristics and behaviour which are typical of rats in general, the 'better' the typewriter, and the 'better' the rat.

(C) *Criticism of the Theory.*

(i) The argument from the bewildering variety of men's moral notions does not prove what it purports to prove. What it shows is that men's moral notions are often partially or even wholly determined by non-ethical considerations; in other words, it shows that what I shall tend to call right will be determined by considerations relative to the advantage of me or of my society, or of the governing class of my society. Admittedly; but the argument does not show that what I call right is the same as what *is* right, and it does not show, therefore, that what *is* right is so determined. People in all times and places have evinced a disposition to call certain things right and wrong, and what at any given moment they will call right and wrong no doubt depends very largely upon the society to which they belong and the age in which they live. Such variations do not, however, invalidate the existence of a standard of absolute right and wrong to which differing judgements will approximate with more or less exactitude, though never perhaps with absolute exactitude. An analogy may help

to elucidate this important point. Let us suppose that a number of people are asked to guess the temperature of a room. Each person's guess will be different, and the differences will be related to and determined by the temperatures of the people guessing. Thus if I have recently emerged from the boiler room of a steamship, I shall guess the temperature to be lower than my friend who has recently come out of a blizzard. The fact that the guesses vary and are subjectively determined does not, however, mean that the room has not an absolute temperature which can be objectively determined, and to which the guesses approximate with varying degrees of exactitude. It so happens that we have an instrument for telling the objective, absolute temperature, but no equivalent means for telling the objective, absolute right or wrong. But the fact that we can experimentally ascertain the one and not the other, does not necessarily mean that the one which we happen to be able to ascertain exists while the other which we cannot ascertain does not exist. The moral would seem to be that nobody is entitled to deduce from the fact that I call right what you call wrong the conclusion that there is no such thing as right and wrong, but only our divergent opinions about right and wrong. If there were in fact no such thing, it would be difficult to see what our divergent opinions were divergent opinions about.

(ii) This brings us to a further difficulty. If subjectivism is correct, 'X is good' means 'X produces a feeling of approval in me'; 'X is right' means 'X conduces to my advantage'. To say 'X is good or right' means, in fact, the same as to say 'X is pleasant', or 'X is expedient', or 'X is useful'.

But if 'X is good' or 'X is right' means the same as 'X is pleasant', or 'X is expedient', or 'X is useful', how did the distinction between good and right, on the one hand, and expedient and useful, on the other, ever come to be made? There is not the slightest doubt that in ordinary life we do habitually make this distinction. 'This', we say, 'is what I should like to do, because it is pleasant; but that is what I ought to do because it is right.' Or we say 'X is a pleasanter companion, but he is not such a good man as Y'. If what is good or right is, in the last resort, exhaustively analysable into what is expedient or pleasant or useful, it is impossible to explain how this distinction came to be

made. It seems reasonable, then, to suppose that the words 'good' and 'right' stand for concepts which we specifically distinguish from those denoted by the words 'pleasant', 'expedient', and 'useful'.

(iii) *The Argument from Origins.*

A third difficulty turns upon what is called the argument from origins. This is the argument upon which subjectivism relies to explain the origin of moral notions. Very briefly the argument is as follows. Originally our ancestors encouraged the performance of certain types of conduct and the formation of certain types of character for non-ethical reasons. Thus they encouraged courageous actions because courage and resolution were useful to the tribe in its struggle for survival with other tribes; they encouraged unselfishness because an unselfish man was a useful member of society in general, and a useful neighbour to yourself in particular; for example, you got a bigger share of the limited food supply if your neighbour were unselfish, than you would do if he were selfish. Thus self-denying proclivities in the individual contributed to the welfare of the whole. It is from utilitarian origins of this kind that ethics, it is said, developed. Men now feel an obligation to do their duty for its own sake and an intuition of the intrinsic value of certain traits of character only because they have forgotten the reasons, the non-ethical reasons, which lie at the basis of and justify their feelings of obligation and approval.

*Criticism of the Argument from Origins (a) That it Does not Show What it Purports to Show.*

This derivation of ethical judgements from non-ethical origins seems to me to be exposed to two fatal objections. The first is one which applies to any form of the argument from origins. Let us suppose that the account just summarized is true, and that ethical sentiments and judgements have arisen by traceable stages from non-ethical. The fact that they *have* so arisen does not alter the fact that they are *bona fide* ethical judgements now. If there is any meaning in the conception of development and growth, there must be more in the developed product than there was in the germ from which it takes its rise; more in the oak



than in the acorn; more in the mathematician's mind than in the intelligence or potentiality for intelligence of the embryo from which the mathematician developed; more in the consciousness of civilized than in the consciousness of Neanderthal man.

The argument from origins is often used to discredit religion. Religion, it is pointed out, began as propitiation and sacrifice. Its appeal was to fear; its method was bribery and its practice consisted of rites and taboos, of totemism and of exogamy. And therefore? Therefore, there is no more in the developed religion of civilized people than propitiation and sacrifice, fear, bribery, totemism, exogamy and taboo. For what religion was at the beginning, so, it is suggested, it must always remain; so, then, it must essentially be now. The distinctive marks of the religion of civilized man are nothing more than adventitious trimmings and trappings which more or less imperfectly disguise its essential nature. Such briefly, is the argument.

A similar argument might, of course, be applied to the development of mathematics, a development which also proceeds by traceable steps from the savage's capacity to count on the fingers of one hand. But it is not so applied, since so to apply it would surely be to expose its falsity; for nobody supposes that the fact that the savage *can* only count on the fingers of one hand invalidates the multiplication table, or that the demonstration that Einstein was once a fish and still carries under the skin of his neck the rudiments of gills tells us much about the mind of Einstein now. Similarly the fact that religion began as totemism and exogamy—if it did—does not invalidate the fact that it is something very different from totemism and exogamy now, any more than the fact that ethical sentiments derive from considerations of tribal expediency—if they do—proves that they may not be something very different, namely, sentiments of ethics and *not* of expediency, now. When one is interpreting a developing thing, and trying to give some account of its present nature and condition, it is as legitimate to look to what it is trying to become as to that which it once was; as necessary to take into the account the goal or purpose which it may be seeking to achieve as the origin from which it developed. Its present condition and nature may look backward to its beginning, but they also look forward to its end and no account of it which

pretends to be adequate can afford to neglect that in it which derives from this forward look.

If it is conceded that we must judge a thing by its fruits no less than by its roots, we cannot accept a description of the roots as sufficient for an adequate account of its present nature, for its nature, as the Greeks insisted, will be realized only when it has achieved its full development. So long as it fails to achieve its full development, it fails to be completely itself.

These considerations bear directly upon the subjectivist account of the development of ethical sentiments from a non-ethical origin. They constitute an objection to this account not because they suggest that the account may not be true, but because they show that, if it is true, it does not prove what it is intended to prove. It does not, that is to say, prove that ethical judgements, even if they do derive from non-ethical judgements, may not be genuinely ethical now. And by 'genuinely ethical' I mean, able to report upon the presence of good or bad, right or wrong, in the situation judged, just as our visual judgements report on the shape and colour of the object seen. The proof of the derivation of ethical judgements from a non-ethical origin would not, that is to say, if it could be established, show that it is impossible for ethical judgements which are made *now* to be objective.

But—and here we come to the second objection—the question arises, *can* it be established? For what does it pre-suppose? That there was once a time when human beings made no ethical judgements of any kind, that presently they began to do so, but that the ethical judgements which they then made were not genuine, but were cheats, cheats, moreover, which contrived to deceive everybody, including those who made them.

(b) *That the Facts upon which it is Based are Probably False.*

There are two considerations which render this account in the highest degree unpalatable. The first is that it offends against the principle which I have already invoked upon a number of occasions in the course of the arguments of the preceding chapters, the principle which denies that from a combination of entities not possessing a quality, you can produce a complex product which possesses that quality. You cannot, I have

affirmed, from a combination of non-coloured particles produce colour; you cannot, I now add, from a combination of judgements of expediency, derive judgements of ethics either by inheritance or through forgetfulness. It may, of course, be true that there was once a class of beings who were only capable of making judgements of expediency; but, if there were, they could not have produced offspring in whom these judgements of expediency were superseded by judgements of ethics. Hence the emergence of a class of beings who *first* made judgements of ethics must have been in the nature of a new creation.

But let us suppose that the children of the 'expediency only' beings could and did pass judgements of ethics. What motive could they have had for so doing? Expediency says 'Do this because it will pay', ethics 'Do this because it is right or good', or 'Do this because you ought to do it'. What we are asked to suppose is that up to a certain point in human development people only recognized the pull of 'it pays', but that after that point they suddenly began to appeal to 'it is right', 'it is good' and 'you ought', and to appeal to these imperatives because they felt their pull. But why should they? Why should concepts which had previously no driving force or pulling power suddenly, or even gradually, come to exert them? There must presumably have been a moment in the history of mankind when the pull of the moral imperative—'Do this because you ought to do it'—was first felt and expressed in a moral judgement. But how could the moral judgement have been made and how could it have exerted an influence over the conduct of those to whom it was addressed, if human beings had never recognized anything but expediency? How, in fact, are we to explain either the genesis or the compulsive power of the notion 'It ought to be done because it is right' upon beings who, according to the theory, had previously recognized only what paid.

Finally—to return to what is after all the strongest consideration—if 'it is right' means in the long run only 'it is expedient', or 'our ancestors thought it expedient', how did the distinction between rightness and expediency ever come to be made? As I have already pointed out, we do commonly make this distinction and believe that a real difference of meaning is involved. The two meanings are, in fact, frequently opposed.

Yet the theory would have us believe that the distinction is unreal since the word 'right' has no meaning except in terms of what people have thought 'right', and what people have thought 'right' is, it is averred, simply what they have thought (or their ancestors have thought) would pay. Then why did they ever go out of their way to invent the concept 'right' in order that they might also 'think it right'? Why were they not content to say 'it pays'? Why should they have gratuitously invented what is *ex hypothesi*, on this view, a meaningless concept, substituted it for the concept of expediency which for them alone had meaning, and then appealed to one another to do things in its name? The invention would seem to have been as inexplicable as it was pointless.

A word may be added on the identification of 'good' with the efficient performance of function exemplified by the quotation from Dr. Waddington given on a previous page.<sup>1</sup> It will not, I hope, in the light of the preceding criticisms, be necessary to deal at length with this translation of 'good' into 'efficient'. It is, it is obvious, desirable that some functions should be performed in the sense in which it is not desirable that others should be performed. The function of a rack is to torture and a 'good' rack, according to Dr. Waddington's definition, is one that tortures efficiently. The object of an anæsthetic is to relieve pain and a 'good' anæsthetic is similarly one that relieves pain efficiently. But, one surely is entitled to ask, are not the ends which the rack and the anæsthetic are respectively devoted to promoting, different in value? Is it not *good* that pain should be relieved in some sense in which it is *bad* that pain should be inflicted? And is not the sense in which the word 'good' is being used when this question is asked, totally different from that in which it is used by Dr. Waddington to indicate efficiency in the performance of function? Similarly, with the identification of 'good' with being as completely as possible oneself, or realizing as completely as possible one's type—Dr. Waddington's rat example. Some people and some types are surely good, others bad. It is good, for example, that there should be compassionate men and kindly types; bad, that there should be cruel men and sadistic types. Now the sense in which the word 'good' is here

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 198, 199 above.

used is again different from the sense in which it is used when it is said that it is 'good' that a thing should realize itself or its type as completely as possible. Moreover, the sense in which the word 'good' is used when it is said that it is 'good' that there should be gentle people, or when it is said that it is 'good' that pain should be relieved, is obviously its proper and distinctive sense, the sense in which it means that something is an end in itself, or ought to exist in its own right. If we use 'good' instrumentally, as Dr. Waddington does, to indicate something which is 'good' because it produces something or performs something or helps to realize something, then we have no sense of the word left over to convey our conviction that some 'somethings' are better than other 'somethings', and that it is better, therefore, to promote the first 'somethings' even, it may be, inefficiently, than to promote the second 'somethings' with the greatest possible amount of efficiency. In other words, more of what is 'good' in Dr. Waddington's sense of the word, may be equivalent to less of what is 'good' in the true sense of the word, *vice versa*.

*Summary of Objections to the Subjectivist Interpretation of Moral Judgements.*

I conclude that the judgement 'This is right' is not *always* a disguised form of 'This is expedient', and that it can at least sometimes have an independent and objective meaning of its own. The main reason for holding that the judgement 'This is right' is subjective was, as we have seen, that people have habitually called right that which is biologically or socially useful. If, however, we conclude that to say 'This is right' is not the same thing as to say 'This is biologically or socially useful', the ground for holding that 'This is right' means merely 'This is approved of by some, by most, or by all people' disappears. But if the most plausible reason for supposing that moral judgements which are objective in form are nevertheless subjective in fact disappears, there is no good ground for supposing that they may not sometimes be objective in fact.

I conclude that moral judgements such as 'this is right' or 'this is good' or 'this ought to be done' can *sometimes* be objective in the sense that they can really refer to and may on occasion

correctly report ethical characteristics or features of the universe. They may, of course, and no doubt they usually do, report them wrongly, but they can at least refer to them, and it is, therefore, theoretically possible that they may *sometimes* report them rightly. The universe, then, contains 'good', 'right' and 'ought' as independent factors in its fundamental make-up. To say that these factors are independent means that they are not merely *in*, or projections of our minds, but exist apart from us and are noted and responded to by our minds. The universe, then, is a moral universe. Similarly, I should conclude, though I do not attempt to demonstrate here, that aesthetic judgements may be objective in the sense that they may report, whether truly or falsely, on the presence of beauty in things, and that the universe is, therefore, an æsthetic universe which contains beauty as well as goodness as an independent principle.<sup>1</sup> I have already argued that truth is objective in the particular sense that the statement 'so and so is true' is not equivalent to the statement 'it suits my purposes to believe it'; and it is not equivalent precisely because there is an independent standard of truth to which statements and judgements may conform, and by reference to which their correctness may be assessed. I now turn to the question of the subjectivity or objectivity of religious judgements.

### III. THE SUBJECTIVIST THEORY OF RELIGION

#### (A) *The Subjectivist Interpretation of Religious Judgements.*

The subjectivist mode of interpreting religious judgements is as follows. The judgement 'God exists and is good', is not a statement about God any more than the judgement 'These gooseberries are sweet' is a statement about the gooseberries. It is a statement about the opinions, or rather about the needs of the person judging, and what it asserts is that the person judging thinks something, feels something, or needs something. To say 'God exists' means, in other words, no more than that I have a need to believe in Him; it is, therefore, a statement not about the universe but about my experience. There is the same complication here as in the case of ethical judgements, since

<sup>1</sup> I have attempted this demonstration in my *Guide to Philosophy*, Chapter XII, and in *Matter, Life and Value*, Chapter VI.

for the expression 'my experience' we can read 'the experience of all or most men who have ever lived' or 'the experience of all or most men now living in the community to which I belong' or 'the experience or the wishes or the interests of the governing class of my community'. Hence, to make a religious judgement is to say something about the minds or the needs or the interests of all or most men.

How do these needs and interests arise?

*The Subjectivist Account of the Origins of Religion.*

Primitive man is represented as living in an incomprehensible world, at the mercy of forces which he can neither understand nor control, forces of fire and flood, of earthquake and drought; his crops fail, his communities are stricken by famine, and swept by pestilence and disease. The feeling of helplessness engendered by these calamities is intolerable to him. Accordingly, he devises beings who are endowed with the power to control the forces which are by him uncontrollable. Some of these beings, the nature gods, are benevolent and control the impersonal forces in his interest; others, the devils and demons of primitive mythology, are by nature capricious, even if they are not positively hostile. Compared, however, with impersonal forces, even the naturally hostile beings possess one great advantage, which is that, being semi-human, they are accessible by human beings and responsive to human intercession. By bribery and propitiation the favour of the benevolent can be assured and the ill-will of the malevolent averted. Accordingly, offerings are made of cows and cattle, of prisoners taken in war, or of the virgins of the tribe. A regular hierarchy of bribery is established. Thus a chief's daughter will appease greater anger, will secure more favour, than the daughter of a common man.

In these practices, it is said, we may discern the origin of religion. God is not a being existing in independence of man, a real and objective factor in the universe; He is man's creation, the product of his fears and the recipient of his bribes. That is why man's gods have exhibited man's qualities, man's all too human qualities. Like men they are jealous and possessive; like men they are subject to fits of anger, of anger which must be averted; like men they are responsive to flattery and their good

offices can be secured by propitiation. As civilization advances, the anthropomorphic figures of primitive mythology grow nebulous and dim; in highly civilized communities they have been, to all intents and purposes, discarded. But man's need for help and comfort does not disappear; on the contrary, it is as strong as it ever was and, oddly enough, with the growth of science grows stronger.

*Loneliness of the Scientific Universe.*

The universe revealed by science is, we know, immeasurably huge; it is also, so far as we can tell, completely lifeless. In the vast immensities of geological space and astronomical time life seems like a tiny glow, flickering uncertainly for a time, but doomed ultimately to extinction, so soon as the material conditions which gave it birth cease to obtain. One day the sun will either collide with another star, or become extinct. When that catastrophe happens, life will cease to be.

From such a universe the gods and goddesses of antiquity have long since disappeared. It contains no hint either of the divine or of the human. There is nothing at the heart of things that is spiritual or friendly to man. The following account from a more eloquent pen than mine, that of Sir James Frazer, writing in *The Belief in Immortality*, describes the process of God-elimination which I have so briefly summarized.

'From one department of nature after another the gods are reluctantly or contemptuously dismissed and their provinces committed to the care of certain abstract ideas, of ethers, atoms, molecules and so forth, which, though just as imperceptible to human senses as their divine predecessors, are judged by prevailing opinion to discharge their duties with regularity and despatch, and are accordingly firmly installed on the vacant thrones amid the general applause of the more enlightened portion of mankind. Thus, instead of being peopled with a noisy, bustling crowd of full-blooded and picturesque deities, clothed in the graceful form and animated with the warm passions of humanity, the universe outside the narrow circle of our consciousness is now conceived as absolutely silent, colourless and deserted. The cheerful sounds which we hear, the bright hues which we see, have no existence, we are told, in the



external world; the voices of friends, the harmonies of music, the chime of falling waters, the solemn roll of ocean, the silver splendour of the moon, the golden glory of the sunset, the verdure of summer woods, and the hectic tints of autumn—all these subsist only in our minds; and if we imagine them to have any reality elsewhere we deceive ourselves. . . . Outside of ourselves there stretched away on every side, an infinitude of space, without sound, without light, without colour—a solitude traversed only in every direction by an inconceivable complex web of silent and impersonal forces. That, if I understand it, is the general conception of the world which modern science has substituted for polytheism.'

Such are the outlines of the universe sketched by physical science. And, frankly, we find it intolerable; so intolerable that we are driven to clothe the universe in the garments of our imagination in order to be able to assure ourselves that the *physical* is not all. The outlines, we insist, are not the whole of reality; they are not even true reality at all, for behind them, we argue, there must be something which is spiritual and akin to ourselves, something which, once conceived in our own immediate image as God, has to-day with the growth of sophistication been depersonalized—do we not pride ourselves upon our emancipation from the gross anthropomorphism of savages?—into the values truth, goodness and beauty. The values, then, are not independent factors in the universe existing in their own right, the standards of human valuation, the objects of human aspiration, and the goals of human effort; they are figments projected by man's loneliness upon the canvas of a meaningless universe for his comfort and assurance. Oblivious of their origin, he subsequently proceeds to discover in the cosmos the values which he himself has put there, and endows with objectivity the products of his subjective need. The origin of God is not other than that of the values.

Men, then, according to the subjectivist account, have believed in religion not because it is true, but because it is comforting and convenient; it is comforting to the individual and convenient to the government, constituting a strait jacket for the restraint of man's untamed impulses and a recipe for the maintenance of decent conduct in society. Give man nothing to

worship and nothing to revere and, in Disraeli's words, 'He will find altars and idols in his own heart and his own imagination . . . fashioning his own divinities and finding a chieftain in his passions'. (It is surely precisely this that has happened on the Continent.) And so, we are told, we must retain the forms and beliefs of religion, until the ignorant and superstitious masses are sufficiently enlightened to do without them.

*The Subtlest of the Wish-Fulfilments.*

There is a further form of religious subjectivism, subtler and more difficult to detect than any of the foregoing. It is that to which Pascal invites us. There is no one of us, unless he be a fool or a coxcomb, so armoured in complacency but that he knows himself to be lacking in virtue and wisdom. The wise man cannot but know his own folly; the strong man his own weakness. For many of us, the difficulty of trying to live aright is too great, if we have nothing more secure to lean upon than what a recent writer has called 'the slender integrity of our own puny reason and the wavering uncertainty of our own ethical judgement'. And so we hunger after leadership in theology no less than in politics; we long for moral no less than for economic security. How ready, then, is the welcome which we extend to the word of the teacher who assures us that, leaderless, we shall fail. By yourself, says Pascal in effect, it is no use trying to do good, you are too sinful; by yourself, it is no use trying to be wise; your folly is too crass. But, fortunately, there is no need to try by yourself since there is one who will lead you, one who will give you the strength to do good and the wisdom to go right. For, fortunately, there is God. Pascal proceeds to employ all his magnificent gifts of logic, literary style and moral fervour to lure men into acceptance of his own belief in the infinite wretchedness and helplessness of man, the infinite goodness of God and the immensity of the gulf that lies between them, a gulf bridgeable only by Divine Grace. I say that this is the subtlest of all the forms of subjectivism because it appeals to some of the best qualities in men. It appeals to their natural humility; it exploits their justifiable modesty, in order to assure them that there is a God who will, if they pray to him, supply the deficiencies of which their modesty and humility make them only too sensible.

There is, of course, no God, the subjectivist reminds us, but you can see how the modest, decent chap is led into thinking that there is.

The conclusion of all these accounts of religious judgements and religious beliefs is the same as the conclusion of the subjectivist accounts of moral or aesthetic experience. When man enjoys religious, moral or aesthetic experience, he believes himself to be looking through windows at a world beyond, when he is fact looking into a mirror at himself.

I have summarized the subjectivist account in my own way, gathering up into the summary a number of strands in contemporary thought—for most of us are to-day subjectivists of one kind or another. I feel, therefore, that it is incumbent on me to substantiate the summary by a direct reference to the works of one of the many thinkers who are advocates of subjectivist views and not, as I am, their critic. I take as an example an Essay from a recently published book by Julian Huxley called *The Uniqueness of Man*. The title of the Essay in question is *Religion as an Objective Problem*. Huxley is concerned to indicate some of the factors which combine to 'generate' what he calls 'religious reactions'. Among the most important of these are the 'relations between parts of the self'—not, be it noted, the relations of the self to something other than and greater than the self, but relations between different elements in the self. There is 'the inevitability of conflict'; there is the 'illimitable nature of desire and aspiration'—we are not told for what; there is man's 'concept-forming activity' which 'gives rise to abstract terms like justice, truth and beauty'. (These, then, are figments of our making, owning no counterpart in the nature of things. Huxley conceives them to be the product of our intellects, empty so long as they remain intellectual, but perennially filled by 'illimitable desire with its imaginings'.) Men, in short, require to be comforted and reassured, and for this purpose they invoke forces of reassurance which are felt to be both eternal and unchanging. From the conflict of and combination between these various factors God emerges to satisfy our desires and to fulfil our needs. So conceived, God is an emanation from the mind of man, His creator. 'Supernatural powers were created by man to carry the burden of religion. From diffuse magic

*mana* to personal spirits; from spirits to gods; from gods to God—so, crudely speaking, the evolution has gone.’

In the modern world God has become what Huxley calls an escape mechanism. The twentieth-century world is full of pain and wickedness; men’s daily lives oscillate between dullness and disaster. It is difficult to believe that things will get better; it is reasonably certain that they will not get better in this life; men are too sinful, States too ruthless to justify any such hope. It is not in this world, then, that our aspirations after the ideal can be realized and our desires for perfection can be gratified. Yet realized and gratified they must be, and so we are led to fabricate another world to which to transfer the perfections which are lacking and the fulfilments which are denied in this one.

Thus the supernatural world which religion affirms, is an ‘escape mechanism’. Unfortunately it is not as effective an ‘escape mechanism’ as it used to be. One reason for its diminished effectiveness is the influence of natural science which, as it advances, brings an ever greater area of the natural world within the scope of its system of explanation, reduces supernatural intervention to a minimum, and, in Huxley’s words, ‘has pushed God into an ever greater remoteness, until his function as ruler and dictator disappears and he becomes a mere first cause or vague general principle’.

Another reason is the influence of psychology in general and of psycho-analysis in particular which explores the basic trends of the human mind, reveals the strength of our need for comfort and assurance, and shows how God results from our disposition to project into the outside world the figments of our imagination to satisfy our need. Moreover, psychology purports to explain on purely natural lines experiences such as the sense of presence and communion, which have hitherto been regarded as evidence for the activity of a supernatural personage working in the heart of man. And so we come to the conclusion which I give in Huxley’s own words:

‘Theistic belief depends on man’s projection of his own ideas and feelings into nature: it is a personification of non-personal phenomena. Personification is God’s major premise. But it is a mere assumption, and one which, while serviceable

enough in earlier times, is now seen not only to be unwarranted, but to raise more difficulties than it solves. Religion, to continue as an element of first-rate importance in the life of the community, must drop the idea of God or at least relegate it to a subordinate position, as has happened to the magical element in the past. God, equally with gods, angels, demons, spirits and other small spiritual fry, is a human product, arising inevitably from a certain kind of ignorance and a certain degree of helplessness with regard to man's external environment. . . . A faint trace of God, half metaphysical and half magic, still broods over our world, like the smile of a cosmic Cheshire cat. But the growth of psychological knowledge will rub even that from the universe.'

It would certainly seem at first sight as if this conclusion were in contradiction to the account given by Huxley of God to which I referred in the preceding chapter,<sup>1</sup> the account which represents God as a by-product or function of the reaction of man's spirit to the forces of the external world. The contradiction is only apparent. For the word 'God', as used by Huxley to denote the function, should be put into quotation marks to indicate that his title is courtesy only. Huxley does not really mean that the function of the reaction of man's spirit is a God in the religious sense of the word 'God'. On the contrary, he affirms that the mistake of man has been to project the function into the external world and there to accord it religious veneration. It is against this mistake and its consequence, the independent, objective God, that Huxley is protesting.

*(B) Criticism of the Subjectivist Interpretation of Religious Judgements.*

Clearly if Huxley is right, religion is a delusion. Even if an independent God exists, we are precluded from knowing or even from saying anything about Him, since any belief that we chose to entertain would turn out on examination to refer only to our own opinions, any judgement that we ventured to pass to be a judgement about our own feelings and experiences. What can be urged against this view? There are, I suggest, at least three major difficulties to which it is exposed.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 168, 169.

(i) *The Argument from Origins Again.*

The first is one to which I have already drawn attention in criticizing the subjectivist interpretation of morals. The case that I have just summarized starts by detecting a rudimentary religious impulse in the early stages of man's history, traces its growth from the ritual and magic of the savage into the developed religious sentiment of modern civilized man, and then proceeds to infer that what it was at the beginning and in origin, that, essentially, it is now. This is to commit in a new form the fallacy of supposing that there is no more in the fruit than there was in the roots. I have already commented on this fallacy<sup>1</sup> and do not propose to say more about it here, except to point out that while nothing has yet been said to show that religion is more than ritual and magic, the argument from origins certainly does not prove that it is not more. Yet the application of this argument to religion is supposed to yield the conclusion that because primitive man made gods and devils to fertilize his crops and frighten his enemies, *therefore* religion is still a function of man's god- and devil-making propensities, and that that is all that it is.

(ii) *That Religious Experience is Never Merely Arbitrary and Subjective.*

The second consideration is more important. Religion, say the subjectivists, is the outcome of man's needs and the projection of his wishes. They do not proceed to ask whether there may not be significance in the fact that he feels the needs and entertains the wishes. Are *they*, one cannot help asking, to be written off as arbitrary, as mere given facts, receiving no explanation and needing none?

Man's needs and wishes are the expressions of man's nature; they are what they are because he is what he is. How then, did man come to be what he is? To this question those who take the subjectivist view—and I refer here more particularly to the biologists, for whom I have taken Julian Huxley as spokesman—give a quite definite answer. Man, they say, has evolved in and through interaction with his environment. This is a non-committal statement to which, I imagine, all biologists would subscribe. The materialists would go further and exhibit life as a mere function

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 202, 203.

of its environment, a by-product of the workings of purely natural forces; the mind of the living organism they represent as an emanation of an epiphenomenon upon the body. Thus a chain of causation is established which begins in the external environment, stretches across the living body of the organism *via* the stimulus-response linkage, and ends in the body of the organism *via* the nerves-brain-mind linkage. Events in the mind of man must, then, in the last resort be regarded as the end products of a chain of causation stretching back to events in the physical world of nature.

We must suppose that this process has continued over a very long period. Throughout the whole of this period everything that has occurred in a mind or consciousness of any kind is the indirect result of something which has first occurred in the world external to the mind or consciousness. Must it not, then, happen that mind will become a reflection or register of the outside world, reproducing its features and taking its shape, as the bust reproduces the features and takes the shape of the mould in which it is cast? But if it is a reflection, the characteristics of the mind will reproduce at least in part the characteristics of the environment in which they have evolved and which they reflect. The needs and wishes of a mind are among its characteristics. Hence its needs and wishes will not be arbitrary, but will reflect features in the external world which generate the needs and provoke the wishes. But if they generate and provoke, must they not also fulfil and satisfy, or at least be capable of fulfilling and satisfying?

I do not wish to suggest that this materialist account of the function and origin of human beings and wishes is true. I do not think that it is. I am only concerned to point out that, *if it is true*, then the needs and wishes which religion seeks to fulfil and to satisfy must point to some factor in the external world which has generated them, and which guarantees the possibility of their satisfaction. Nor do I wish to suggest that most scientists, still less to suggest that most critics of religion, are materialists. It is far from being the case that it is necessary to be a materialist in order to adopt a subjectivist interpretation of religious judgements. But few of those who have any tincture of modern science will be found to deny the evolutionary hypothesis; few, therefore, will deny that man evolved in an environment, and that he owes

many if not all his characteristics to his struggle to survive in that environment, and what I am insisting is that it is not logically possible to subscribe to this generally accepted view and *then* to write off man's needs and wishes as merely given and arbitrary; as, that is to say, non-significant. They must surely, on this hypothesis, be significant of some feature in the environment of which they are the products, and with which, therefore, they are correlated.

*Man's Feeling for the Numinous.* Let me try to illustrate the point by citing a particular case. Man feels fear of the external world; he feels lonely in the external world; he sees the external world to be immeasurably vast. But in addition to his sense of fear, of loneliness and of his own insignificance, he has also a sense of awe; he is not only afraid of, he is awed by the universe; he does not only acknowledge the vastness of the external world, he has a disposition to revere it. Now this sense of awe, this disposition to revere, are distinctive psychological experiences. As Mr. Lewis has pointed out in an admirably penetrating discussion in his book *The Problem of Pain*, they are evoked by a divine quality in the universe. He gives many examples of these feelings, ranging from Ezekiel and Aeschylus to Wordsworth and Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. The feeling in question is not fear, for fear is felt for that which is dangerous; it is more like the feeling of a man who is brought into contact with the abnormal and the uncanny, as when he sees or thinks that he sees a ghost. Nevertheless our feeling in regard to the uncanny, though like is not the same, for we have no disposition to revere a ghost.

To the quality in things which excites awe and reverence Professor Otto has given the name of the 'numinous'. Nature, he would seem to suggest, is but an envelope for deity, and the presence of the informing spirit, felt at times and in places where the envelope wears thin, is the source of our complex reaction of reverence and awe.

That this experience, the experience of the 'numinous', has been enjoyed by human beings all the way down the ages, few, I think, would be disposed to deny. What account are we to give of it? There seem, says Mr. Lewis, in his book *The Problem of Pain*, to be two alternatives. 'Either it is a mere twist in the



human mind, corresponding to nothing objective and serving no biological function, yet showing no tendency to disappear from that mind at its fullest development in poet, philosopher, or saint; or else it is a direct experience of the really supernatural, to which the name Revelation might properly be given.'

Now that it should be the first of these is precisely what, I should have thought, a purely materialistic account of man and his environment would be forced to deny. For such an account simply could not, on its own premises, admit that human beings possess experiences which are causeless in the sense of being responses to no stimuli and 'twists' which are the psychological correlates of no objective counterpart; and it could not admit this, because it could not admit the occurrence of arbitrary causeless events, or of arbitrary, because causeless, dispositional traits. I think the materialist would be right in arguing that we cannot explain our feeling for the 'numinous' except on the assumption that there is some objective feature in nature which excites it; that the judgement 'this grove, this wood, this meadow, this mountain is "awesome" or "sacred"' cannot be a purely subjective judgement to the effect that I am experiencing a certain emotion, but must in some sense report the presence of some factor in my environment which is the origin of, because it causes me to feel, the emotion.

I do not wish to suggest that our feeling for the 'numinous' in nature is the whole or even the most important part of religious experience. I take it as one example of the religious emotion to illustrate a more general contention, which is, that, if we cannot divorce our feeling for the 'numinous' from the objective background in which it arises, we cannot explain certain other religious experiences except as reactions to features in the environment which cause *them*; except, therefore, on the basis of the religious hypothesis.

### (iii) *How is the Religious Emotion to be Explained?*

My third objection to the subjectivist interpretation of religious judgements can most conveniently be introduced by taking man's sensitiveness to the 'numinous' in nature as a starting point. Explanations of this sensitiveness, experienced by us as an

emotion of awe or reverence are, of course, offered on a subjectivist basis. Anthropologists point out that primitive men fear the dead, fear, therefore, the places where the dead are buried. In the course of time the reason why one such particular place is feared is forgotten, and the place arouses a feeling of dread for which no cause can be assigned. The argument from origins is then invoked to show that the emotion under discussion is, in its essential nature, no more than the fear of the dead from which it historically derived.

There are many difficulties in this account. There is the fallacy (to which attention has already been drawn) which lies concealed in most arguments from origins. Even if the feeling for the 'numinous' derives from fear of the dead, this does not alter the fact that it is something very different from fear of the dead now. Again, I have argued that the emotions of awe and reverence, of which our feeling for the 'numinous' is composed, are psychologically different from fear or even dread. But suppose we accept the explanation: suppose that the emotion is a developed version of the fear of the dead from which it derives. Does not the explanation beg the very question which it purports to answer by the simple process of putting it farther back? For what is the explanation? I fear places now, because my ancestors feared the dead once. Why, then, did my ancestors fear the dead? There is no answer.

The difficulty which I have illustrated by the example of our feeling for the 'numinous' rises up to confront subjective modes of explanation in different forms, which vary according to the form the subjective mode of explanation assumes. I have already referred to one of these forms in connection with moral subjectivism. If all we mean by 'This is right' is 'This is expedient' or 'This was found to be expedient by our ancestors', why, I asked, do we go out of our way to invent a totally meaningless conception, the conception of 'right', substitute it for a meaningful conception, that of 'expediency', and make use of the former when we mean the latter? If, on the other hand, we concede that our remote ancestors may have been capable of genuine moral feelings—of moral feelings, that is to say, that were not a disguised version of non-moral ones—then I suggested—and here I propose to pay the subjectivists the compliment of presuming them

intelligent enough not to fall into the common fallacy of supposing that, if you push back a difficulty in point of time, you have somehow got rid of it—we are still faced with the problem of explaining the occurrence of moral emotions in a non-moral universe. Are these, like man's feeling for 'numinous', to be regarded as arbitrary facts about human nature which have no relation to the universe in which human nature has evolved? It seems unlikely.

*Some Current Explanations of the Feeling of Moral Guilt.*

A fashionable example of the attempt to explain away the moral consciousness by exhibiting it as a disguised version of something else is the explanation of the feeling of guilt in terms of the Oedipus complex. Oedipus unknowingly killed his father and had children by his mother. This legend is presented by many psycho-analysts as a symbolical version of the alleged fact that many of us desire to have sexual relations with our mothers and accordingly hate our fathers as being rivals for our mothers' affection, but do not permit ourselves to realize that we so desire and hate. In psychological parlance these feelings are repressed into the unconscious. Here, however, they are not passive but active, and proceed to express themselves in all manner of feelings of approval and disapproval for apparently totally unrelated things, events and people. This process, whereby an unconscious desire for one thing appears in consciousness as a desire for or aversion from a totally different thing, is known as sublimation. The concept of sublimation is applied with great ingenuity and boldness. Thus my unconscious desire to elope with my next-door neighbour's wife may appear in consciousness as a sudden aversion from pickled walnuts. It is on these lines that the moral experience which expresses itself in judgements of approval, and, perhaps more frequently, in judgements of disapproval is explained. Thus the feelings of guilt experienced by me as a little boy because I was cruel and pulled the wings off flies, or the feelings of guilt which I experienced as an adolescent because I succumbed to the temptation of masturbation are explained as sublimated versions of my unconscious desire to kill my father or to mate with my mother. Generalizing the Freudian psychological theory of the unconscious causation of conscious events, we may say

that the feeling of moral guilt is derived from the potential desire for parricide or incest, or rather from the inhibition of the potential desire for parricide or incest. The judgement 'X is wrong' or 'X ought not to be done' is not, then, objective in the sense that it asserts that there is an objective quality of wrongness about the X in question; it only reports the fact that I am being made to feel guilty because of my repressed desire for father-slaying, or mother-loving; this feeling of guilt I have sublimated and projected on to X.

Again the explanation burkes the issue by begging the question to be explained. Why do I feel guilt now? Because, we are told, I or possibly my remote ancestors desired to commit parricide or incest. And therefore? Therefore, presumably, I or my remote ancestors felt guilt because they so desired. Now either parricide and incest were things they thought they ought not to have done, or they were not. If they were, then the feeling of guilt which the theory seeks to explain away is still found to be attaching itself to that which is invoked as the explanation of it. If they were not, it is impossible to see how the process leading to the feeling of guilt in me now could ever have begun. I conclude that the feeling of moral guilt can no more be derived from a remote past in which men did not feel morally, than the feelings of awe and reverence can be derived from a universe in which nothing is sacred or awesome, or the feeling of aesthetic appreciation from a universe in which nothing is beautiful.

*Some Current Explanations of the Feeling of Aesthetic Appreciation.*

The case of aesthetics raises issues of its own which cannot be pursued here. It is sufficient to point out that it illustrates the same difficulty. The subjectivist view of aesthetics maintains that nothing in itself is either beautiful or ugly; that the universe is, in other words, not one which contains aesthetic characteristics. To say 'This picture is beautiful' means, therefore, on this view, merely that the speaker, or that most people, or that most of those people who are qualified to judge, enjoy a distinctively pleasurable feeling when they look at it. To this feeling we may, if we like, give the name of 'aesthetic'. But since there is no distinctive characteristic about the picture—the universe being on this assumption a non-aesthetic universe—which arouses it

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the so-called pleasurable feeling must be derived from a non-aesthetic origin, just as the feelings which constitute moral experience must be derived from a non-ethical origin. Thus we are told that poetry was devised to memorize the glories of kings; music to increase martial ardour. The dance is represented as an expression of the play impulse and an aid to the mating instinct; while painting originates with the need to make pictorial representations of objects which it is desired to remember, or of people who desire that they should be made memorable, and so on. In a word, the origin of art is referred to utilitarian considerations and social and biological needs. The difficulties to which this account is exposed should be by now familiar. How, out of a combination of non-aesthetic emotions can there be generated an emotion which is specifically and qualitatively different from any of its constituents? Even if the derivation of the aesthetic emotion from non-aesthetic origins could be successfully established, the fact that it could would not prove that the aesthetic emotion was not unique now, and because unique, different from its origins. If it is unique now, it must be an emotion felt for some unique characteristic in the universe which arouses it.

Again, if the universe possesses no aesthetic qualities, how did men ever come to suppose that it did? Why, if all that they mean is 'This picture causes pleasurable emotions in me', did they not content themselves with saying so? Why did they go out of their way to invent a meaningless translation of the expression 'This picture arouses pleasurable emotions in me', into 'This picture is beautiful', and project on to the picture a non-existent characteristic to be the alleged cause of the pleasurable emotions, which then have to be misrepresented as being what they are in fact not, unique emotions, deserving the distinctive name of 'aesthetic'?

### *Julian Huxley's Account of Religious Emotions Criticized.*

The difficulty which attaches to the subjectivist explanation of our response to the 'numinous', our response to what is right and good and our response to beauty applies to the subjectivist explanation of our response to God. (I use the word 'response' in the most general sense to cover all the feelings and emotions, the hopes, the dread, the awe, the reverence, the sense of communion and the interpretation of these which are or may be involved in

religious experience.) To illustrate this difficulty, it will be convenient to return for a moment to Julian Huxley's account of the manufacture and personification of gods which was referred to in an earlier chapter and earlier in this chapter. God is, it will be remembered, for Huxley a complex of the 'material and spiritual forces by which we are surrounded' and 'of human ideals and moral laws' as 'organized by the human personality as a whole'.

The view is further developed in the passage from the article by Dr. Huxley, *Science and Religion*, already cited<sup>1</sup>:—'Man's tendency' is 'to organize his knowledge and his feelings, his desire for understanding and for propitiation, his ideals of virtue, his complementary instincts for self-assertion and self-abasement—these and much else enter into the reaction of his mind to the external complex of forces; and finally, it is his capacity for experiencing things as sacred which makes the reaction a religious one. Under the influence of our all but incurable tendency to project our own personality into the world around us, to personify impersonal forces and abstract ideals, religion has endowed this X or God with personality or super-personality.'

Huxley's account presents a number of puzzling features. What, for example, one wants to know, are 'spiritual forces'? Not, it is obvious, material forces, nor, apparently, the forces of our human nature, but factors in the universe which are at large 'out there' in the world, since it is their impact upon our human nature which starts the process of 'God-making'. Huxley says 'we are surrounded' by them; but if there are spiritual forces at large in the universe outside us and surrounding us, why not a God?

What, again, are 'moral laws'? Human laws in the sense of laws made by man? Then why are they specifically distinguished from 'human ideals'? Why not 'human ideals and laws'? Moreover, we are elsewhere told that 'standards of truth and righteousness' are among 'the complex of facts and forces which impinge on the mind of man' and set him on his course of God-making. The 'standards', then, are not made by us, but are outside us and recognized by us; indeed, it is our awareness of and response to them which apparently causes us to set foot on the path which leads not to God, but to the making of God. But if 'standards of

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 168, 169.

truth and righteousness' are outside us, why should not 'moral laws' also be outside us? If, however, moral laws *are* outside us, if, like the 'standards of truth and righteousness' and the 'spiritual forces', they belong to the order of nature given to us and not created by us, the universe must possess a moral order in its own right. But if a moral order, why not a moral Being?

Waiving these difficulties which arise perhaps from slips of the pen, we come to the crux of the matter with our 'capacity for experiencing things as sacred'. Now either the things we so experience are sacred or they are not. If they are, the world contains sacred things and the objective interpretation of religious phenomena must be accepted. For if sacred things are to be admitted, why not gods or God to make them sacred, and because of their relationship with whom they *are* sacred. If they are not, then, though the world contains spiritual forces, standards of righteousness, moral laws and so on, it does not contain anything which is worthy of our reverence. The difficulty of this account is one which we have encountered many times in the course of the preceding discussion. If there is nothing sacred in the universe, what explanation are we to give of man's 'capacity for experiencing things as sacred'? Is this purely arbitrary, something which he has evolved without cause or reason; as arbitrary as, for example, the capacity to 'experience things' as 'brillig' or as 'slithy' or as 'toves'? If this were so, it would surely be very odd, since man's capacities have evolved in response to the stimulus of an environment which has called them forth. But if the capacity is *not* arbitrary, must we not interpret it by reference to some feature or factor in the universe existing independently of us to which it is related, and to which it responds? If, however, there *are* independent features or factors of sacredness in the universe and we can respond to them, they cannot be factors and features that we ourselves have put there. The 'X', then, is there independently of us.

To sum up, one's question about 'the sacred'—one is almost tempted to say one's question about God—is the same as one's question about beauty, about goodness and the rest. If the universe contains nothing sacred, whence did man derive his conception of the sacred? Or, to put the same point rather differently, if the universe contains nothing sacred, how can he

'experience things as sacred'? I can find no satisfactory answer to these questions.

#### IV. A CONCLUSION

In the absence of a satisfactory answer, I see no way of escaping the conclusion that men and women have moral experience because the universe is a moral universe, and contains some things which are right, others which are wrong, some things which are good, others which are bad; that they have aesthetic experience because the universe is an aesthetic universe, and contains some things which are beautiful and others which are ugly; and that they have religious experience because the universe is a numinous universe and contains some things which are sacred and holy and, because sacred and holy, awe-inspiring. To restate this conclusion in the language used at the beginning of this chapter, moral, aesthetic and religious judgements *can* be objective in the sense that they *can* refer to and report characteristics of the universe existing independently of the person judging. They do not always and necessarily refer to and report the feelings and experiences of the judges.

##### *What the Conclusion Does Not Mean.*

This conclusion does not mean that moral, aesthetic and religious judgements are *always* objective; they may mean merely 'I feel guilty', 'I happen to like this', 'I have a feeling that there is a God who shows Himself in the lightning and speaks in the thunder'. Nor does it mean that, when they are objective their account of the moral, aesthetic, and religious characteristics to which they refer and which they purport to report is true. The judgement 'This is right' may be objective in the sense that it does refer to 'this' and does purport to report an ethical characteristic of 'this', and yet false, for 'this' may be in fact not right but wrong. The judgement 'This is beautiful' may be objective and false, for 'this' may in fact be ugly. The judgement 'God is the author of evil'<sup>1</sup> may be objective and false; God may exist, may have created the world, yet not have created the evil in it. Finally, to come to the case of religious judgements with which this book is more particularly concerned—the

<sup>1</sup> See Isaiah xlv. 6-7.



conclusion that religious judgements *may* be objective, and that the universe does, therefore, possess 'numinous' characteristics to which they can refer, does not tell us much that is important about religion. It does not tell us that there is a God who is a person, that He created the world, or that He is good. It merely says that there is a factor in the universe which exists independently of us, which is the origin and cause of at least *some* religious emotions and experiences, and of which it is possible for the human mind to become aware, however obscurely, and to refer to in its judgements, however obliquely. It says in fact that the universe contains a factor or element which is in and for itself both valuable and worshipful, and it says no more than this.

*Summary of the Argument.*

In one sense this conclusion is hardly worth reaching, for there is a sense in which everybody knows that values exist and are objective. Everybody, that is to say, knows that 'I ought to do this' does not mean the same as 'I should like to do this'; that the statement 'Beethoven is a better musician than the crooner-composer whose work I hear over the wireless' does not mean the same as 'I happen to prefer Beethoven'; that to say '3 plus 2 equals 5' does not mean merely that it suits my convenience and the convenience of most other people to believe it. They know in fact that the word 'ought' has a unique meaning, that some music and painting is really better than other music and other painting, and that some statements are really true and others really false. Nobody in their senses would deny that this is so in practice. Why, then, do people seek to deny it in theory? For three reasons: First, having been brought up in a mental climate whose prevailing winds are those of physics and chemistry, they find difficulty in believing that things can exist which cannot be seen and cannot be touched; secondly, because, confused by the fact that different people take widely differing views as to what is good, beautiful and true, they are wrongly led to conclude that there are no such things as beauty, truth and goodness, which is as if one were to conclude from the fact that every observer makes a different guess at the temperature of the room—the observer's guesses being plainly influenced by the subjective conditions, psychological and physiological, peculiar to

themselves—that the room had no temperature, and that the guesses were, therefore, guesses about nothing; thirdly, because while they of course admit that they *do* make a distinction between ‘I want’ and ‘I ought’, between ‘I happen to like’ and ‘is beautiful’ and between ‘it suits me to believe’ and ‘is true’, they have been misled by a logically defective analysis of the meanings of ‘I ought’, ‘is beautiful’ and ‘is true’. It is defective (a) because it destroys the very distinction which it sets out to explain, so that, if it were true, there would be nothing to analyse, and (b) because instead of resolving, as it purports to do, the meanings of the words ‘ought’, ‘beautiful’ and ‘true’, into ‘want to do’, ‘happen to enjoy’ and ‘like to believe’, it only puts back in time the problem to be solved, transfers it to the minds of our remote ancestors, and there loses it.

Since it requires a little sophistication to understand the three reasons just mentioned, it follows that only persons of a certain degree of sophistication are found to deny the objectivity of values. Uneducated people, never having been led to doubt the immediate dictates of their consciousnesses, not only maintain that things are ‘good’, are ‘beautiful’ and are ‘true,’ but show no disposition to identify these concepts with ‘want to do,’ ‘happen to enjoy’ and ‘like to believe’.

It is, nevertheless, interesting to observe how in the works of the most inveterate subjectivists the values will insist on turning up; having been unceremoniously kicked down the front door-steps, they have a habit of slipping in through the windows of the backyard, when the owner’s attention is engaged elsewhere. I have dwelt elsewhere at length upon this highly symptomatic tendency as it is evinced in the *Essays* of that reformed subjectivist Aldous Huxley, *Essays* which were written before his reformation.<sup>1</sup> I do not wish to bear hardly upon the converted sinner, and, since I started this discussion by quoting one or two illustrative passages from Julian Huxley’s *Religion as an Objective Problem* I will end with two more examples of this tendency from the same essay. What, Huxley is asking, is to be the future of religion? He answers that, since heaven is a myth, religion will be content to build a heaven upon earth.

<sup>1</sup> See my *Return to Philosophy*, Chapters IV and V.

'The prophecy of science about the future of religion is that the religious impulse will become progressively more concerned with the organization of society.'

What, then, the reader wants to know, is the religious impulse? At the answer, which Huxley has given at length in another article, we have already glanced. The impulse is derived, as we have seen, from non-religious origins, from man's feelings of loneliness and helplessness in his external environment and from his habit of 'projecting his own ideas and feelings into nature' and so 'personifying non-personal phenomena'. Judge, then, of our surprise in discovering that the religious impulse expresses itself in a recognition of and aspiration after ideal values. For presently we are told that the process of improving society and ultimately of building a better world is the result of the interaction between two different expressions of the religious spirit, 'one which strives to identify itself with the Socialized State, the other which reacts against the limitations thus imposed and strives to assert and uphold values that are felt to be more permanent and universal.'

What, then, are 'values that are felt to be more permanent and more universal'? We are not told. Are they such as we have created? Then one expression of our spirit, namely the religious impulse, aspires after another expression of the same spirit, namely, values. This seems unlikely. Are the values, then, real and do they exist independently of us? Scarcely, since to admit that they do, would be to abandon the whole subjectivist position. The only possible comment seems to be that the values ought not to have been introduced at all. Yet introduced they are. I mentioned this tendency of the values to enter through the backdoors of even the most strongly guarded subjectivist mansion because it seems to me highly symptomatic, symptomatic of the fact that the values do in fact exist and are active in the minds and souls of men. But to affirm the existence of the values is not the same as to affirm the existence of God. Can we, in view of the difficulties stated in Chapters II and III, take this further step?

## Chapter 7

# IS THERE EXPERIENCE OF GOD?

### RETROSPECT

I want to take stock of the positions I have reached. Matter is not the only form of reality; there are also life and mind which are not emanations from, or by-products of, matter. There are also values; in particular, there are goodness, truth and beauty. These can be known by human consciousness and our knowledge of them carries with it an obligation, to pursue, to realize, to enjoy, perhaps to become one with that which we know. The values, in other words, are for us ideals, goals for our aspiration and ends for our endeavouring. The expressions of these aspirations and endeavourings after value are moral goodness, disinterested learning and research, and art. The values are not created by us; they exist independently of us and our recognition of them bears witness to the presence of ideal or value elements in the universe. The progress of mankind may, indeed, be measured by the extent to which it becomes aware of in consciousness, pursues in conduct, and bears witness to in its own nature, these elements of value. In the last three chapters I have briefly indicated some of the steps by which these conclusions have been reached, and the various positions in which they are embodied, the reasons for the steps, the grounds for the positions having been set out at length in other books. The general conclusion thus stated is one which I have reached before and have indeed held for several years. In certain obvious ways it is unsatisfactory. For example, I have already drawn attention to its untidiness. The universe is no doubt a queer one, but that it should contain matter and life as two independent entities owning no common origin, owning indeed no ascertainable origin of any kind, that it should also contain values which are accepted as given and arbitrary facts, which just happen to be there in the universe and are noticed and desired by life at a given stage of its development—is it, it

may be asked, really quite as queer as that? Does it, indeed, make any sense that it should be *just* like that? And yet the mere fact that one is enquiring at all means that one is looking for *sense* in the universe and expects to find it—for such *sense*, for example, as would be furnished by a single unifying principle, or by a creator. . . .

But then I have already in Chapter III given what seemed to me to be strong reasons against the view that the universe is the expression of a single unifying principle, while the conception of a creative God has brought me up sharp against the various difficulties marshalled in Chapter II.

### *Aristotle's God.*

There is, of course, one conception of the nature of God which does not encounter these difficulties. This is the conception of Aristotle. God, on Aristotle's view, exists and is related to the world, but only as the loved object is related to the lover. God is the object of the world's desire. The world yearns after Him and the yearning is the cause of movement and development in the world; is, in particular, the cause of the process by which, in Aristotle's language, the potential becomes actual, the process which in modern terms we know as evolution. But though God arouses the world's desire and is the cause of its development, He did not create the world nor is He aware of the process which He sets going in it. For how, asks Aristotle, could God who is perfect create that which is imperfect? How, indeed, could He concern himself with it one way or the other? For the perfect, says Aristotle, cannot concern itself with anything less perfect than itself without thereby being diminished in respect of its own perfection. Now there is only one perfect and changeless object in the universe, God Himself. Therefore God's activity is concentrated entirely upon Himself. Aristotle calls it 'an activity of immobility.' More precisely, it is an activity of thought directed everlastingly and unchangingly upon God. God's activity, then is one of self-contemplation. It is difficult for the human mind to grasp the nature of this unchanging activity of self-contemplation. The nearest thing to it in our consciousness is the activity of pure philosophical or scientific thought, or, since God's activity is enjoyable, of pure aesthetic contemplation. Now such

a God performs very few of the functions for which God has been invoked in the past. He is not the 'loving father of us all' who cares for the fall of a sparrow, and so loved the world that He sent His only Son into it to suffer and die for the sins of mankind; but He is exempt from almost all the difficulties attaching to the conception of a creative God to which I referred in earlier chapters. He does not desire, He has no needs, and He did not create imperfect beings; above all, He is not responsible for evil either as the creator of it or as the acquiescer in the continuance of what He personally did not create. So far as this world is concerned, God's only function is to move its appetite or desire.

To a recent book, *Philosophy For Our Times*, I added a postscript affirming my belief in the possibility of such a God. The book was designed primarily to establish the objectivity of value and to trace some of the consequences of its denial in contemporary civilization. Conscious of the difficulty of affirming the reality of values, yet leaving them hanging, as it were, without support in the metaphysical air, I ventured to suggest that the values might constitute or form part of a unity, the unity of Aristotle's God of whom they were the manifestations. The relevant passage was as follows:

'I am not prepared to deny that there is such a unity. On logical grounds it seems to me that it is possible, that it may even be probable. Moreover, if such a unity is to be postulated, we may plausibly regard it as the sort of unity which belongs to a person. On this view, the values will be the modes of that Person's manifestation. Or, to put it in the language of belief, they will be the ways in which God reveals Himself to man, the forms under which He permits Himself to be known. Having gone so far, we might reasonably go further and postulate the existence of a mode of apprehension in addition to the rational, the moral, and the aesthetic by means of which the values are recognized, which directly reveals to us the reality and the nature of this Person. This mode of apprehension would lie beyond those which are involved in the recognition of values, and the Person revealed would Himself stand behind the values, in the sense in which a person's character is revealed in the expression of his face and shines forth in the glance of his eyes'.

I knew at the time that this would not do. Either I had gone too

far and must withdraw from the position into which I had allowed my arguments to push me; or I must go further. The letters of criticism which the book evoked combined with the development of my own thought to convince me that I must go further. Let me try to give more precisely the reasons for my inability to remain content with the position I have described. Broadly, they are two.

*Reasons for Inability to Remain Content with Aristotle's God.*

(1) *The Reason from Personality.* Let us suppose for a moment that in addition to values there is God. How is His relation to the values to be conceived? There must, one would think, be *some* relationship. Merely to add God as another separate ingredient to the several ingredients of a universe which already contains the values, which contains life and which contains matter, would merely be to increase the scandal of the cosmic untidiness and pointlessness of which, in another connection, I have already complained.<sup>1</sup>

Was God, then, made up of the values in the way in which a jigsaw puzzle is made up of its pieces, or a train of its engine and coaches, so that God was simply goodness plus truth plus beauty and nothing more? This would seem unlikely.

The relation which most obviously suggested itself seemed to be that of a unifying principle underlying the values, holding them together, and expressing itself in them. Examples of such a unifying principle would be the design in a picture or the musical idea in the movement of a sonata. A picture is obviously more than the paint and canvas used in its making; a sonata more than the succession of waves in the atmosphere into which physics analyses the sounds that occur when it is played. How would one describe this 'more'? As a whole which manifests itself in and informs each of its parts, so that each part only is what it is because of its place in the whole. Removed from it, considered in and by themselves, the sounds no longer sound the same, the separated objects in the design of the picture literally look different. Similarly, a heart or a lung removed from the living body of which it forms part is literally a different organ from what it was when in the body; different, because in ceasing to

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 5. pp. 169, 170.

be a part of a unifying whole it is divested of its relation both to the other parts and to the whole.

This conception clearly was a step in the right direction, but it did not go all the way. As I have already pointed out,<sup>1</sup> the artist needs a medium in which to create, which is not itself of his creation. The musical idea informs the notes of the sonata, but it does not constitute the physical being of the sounds which it informs. The design of the picture is expressed in the strokes of the brush, but it is other than they. Was there, one wondered, some form of relation which not only embodied the relation illustrated by the case of the sonata and musical idea and the case of the picture and the design, the relation, namely, according to which a whole informed or expressed itself in a material medium which was other than the informing idea, but which went further in the sense that it conceived of the whole as creating the medium of its own expression. It seemed to me that the desired conception was to be found in the relation of a personality to its modes of expression. A man's personality no doubt *expresses* itself in the life he leads, in the gait and gestures of his body, in the tones of his voice, the look of his eyes and the moods of his temperament; but these are more than the medium of the personality's expression. They are also component parts of the personality which they express. The personality, in other words, not only informs them; it *is* them—even if it is also more than they—and they in their turn constitute it. Apart from the picture, there would still be the paint and the canvas, but apart from the personality, the voice, the look and the moods simply would not be. Here, it seemed to me, was the appropriate model on which to conceive God's relation to the values. God expressed Himself in the values; He also created them. In other words, He was both transcendent of them and immanent in them; immanent in the sense that they were all aspects or manifestations of His nature, the modes under which He was most readily and easily known, as a government's policy is known by the laws and regulations in which it expresses itself; and transcendent in the sense that He was more than the sum total of the aspects which were known, and the manifestations which appeared, as the policy of a government may be more than the laws in which it

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 48, 49.



finds imperfect realization and would continue to exist as a policy even if the government never succeeded in passing any laws at all.

*The Reality of a Personality.*

I was familiar with this conception of a personality as being more than the sum total of its aspects. This conception constituted, indeed, for me an outstanding example of the limitations of scientific knowledge, and the existence of modes of knowing which transcend those recognized by science. I had often asked myself the question, in what does the scientific knowledge of a human being consist? To what does it amount? Let us suppose that we were to correlate all the information about a human being with which the various sciences were able to provide us. Let us suppose that such information was made theoretically complete. How much, I wanted to know, did it tell us? In particular, how much *that mattered* did it tell us? I imagined the physicist, the chemist, the physiologist and the anatomist providing us each with an exhaustive and a separately exhaustive account, couched in the language of his own science, of the constituents of a man's body. The psychologist obliged with a catalogue of the activities and faculties of his mind, not omitting a supplementary account from the psycho-analyst in terms of the alleged constituents of his unconscious mind. Then the biologist was called in to describe the origin, the history and characteristics of the species to which he belonged; the anthropologist, who dilated upon the peculiarities of his race and his culture; the historian who described the past of his civilization, and the biographer who described the past of the individual himself. I imagined all these different accounts of him, or rather, of the constituents of his body and mind and of the innumerable factors which go to the making of them, presented as theoretically complete, collated and then printed as an exhaustive report of the individual under examination. How much would such a report tell us? Obviously, it would afford a great quantity of information about the contents of body and mind. In fact, if we considered all the separate reports, receiving from them a full and detailed account of all the several aspects of the individual, we should, I imagined, have access to a reasonably complete catalogue

of information in regard to him. But there was one thing, I concluded that, the reports would not tell us, and that, perhaps, was the most important thing of all, namely, what sort of man he was, regarded as a person. What was he like to know, to be with, and to enjoy or dislike being with? Now the only way to know a man in this sense, to know what sort of person he was, was, I thought, to know him as an acquaintance and, if possible, to love him as a friend.

Two conclusions seemed to follow. First, a personality was more than the sum total of its contents, parts or aspects, and a theoretically complete knowledge of contents, parts and aspects would not be equivalent to knowing the person. In this sense and for this reason, the personality was a whole which was more than the sum of its parts. Secondly, there was a way of knowing other than the way of science. Science took a thing to pieces and classified and catalogued the pieces. If a thing were merely the sum total of its pieces, then the scientific knowledge of it would be exhaustive. If it were more than their sum, that aspect of it in respect of which it *was* 'more', would necessarily slip through the meshes of the scientific net. It was not, then, by means of the analysing and classifying method of science that one *knew* a personality in the sense of knowing what sort of person a man was; it was by insight, by understanding, and perhaps in the last resort by affection. Now let us suppose that a personality and its relation to its aspects afford the most appropriate model on which to conceive the relation of God to the values. Then two analogous conclusions follow. First, a theoretically complete knowledge of the values would not be the same as a knowledge of God, for God would transcend the values. Secondly, the mode of a man's knowing of God would be different from the mode of knowing with which he enjoys beauty, recognizes right or perceives truth. Both these conclusions seem to square with the witness of religious experience.

But if God were a personality, manifesting Himself in the values, but transcending them, it was impossible any longer to conceive him on Aristotle's model, for a personality is interested and active; an omnipotent personality, interested in everything and continuously active. God, then, must be interested in the world and cannot be indifferent to it; God must also be active in

## GOD AND EVIL

the world. He may have created it; He may influence the events that occur in it; He may even, as Christianity supposes, have deliberately sent one (or more) individual human beings into it to assist and guide it, and He may be actively present in the hearts of men.

### (ii) *The Reason from Morality.*

This was, for me, afforded less by logical argument than by personal development. I have told in the third chapter how the new obtrusiveness of the fact of evil engendered the conviction that evil was a real and irreducible factor in the universe, and also, how, paradoxically, the very fact of that conviction brought with it the felt need for a God to assist in the struggle to overcome evil. I have also described in the chapter dealing with philosophies of evolution how these came to seem to me inadequate precisely because they made insufficient provision for the fact of moral conflict and the significance of moral endeavour. The universe they envisaged was not, save in a very subsidiary sense, a moral universe.

Now the admission of the reality of evil entails the view that this is a moral universe, in the sense that it is a universe in which conflict, the conflict between good and evil, is fundamental and presumably continuous. To accept evil as a given fact, and not to seek to overcome it, is possible only in so far as one is oneself evil. But one is not wholly evil, for, even when evil presents itself in the form of personal temptation, one does not *always* succumb; one *sometimes* struggles to overcome it. I am not a good man, but it would be simply untrue to say that I do not hate cruelty and injustice—except, of course, when I wish to inflict the cruelty or stand to benefit from the injustice, though even then I may conceivably feel a qualm as to the means, though I accept or even embrace them for the sake of the ends. Granted, then, that one's human experience includes, and contains as apparently necessary and universal ingredients, the recognition of evil, the disposition to do evil and the obligation to struggle against the disposition, what assurance of victory is there in the struggle? If the struggle is carried on unaided, there is none. I simply am not strong enough by myself to overcome bad habits and to resist evil tendencies; perceiving the better

course, nevertheless I persistently pursue the worse. The good that I would, I refrain from doing; the evil that I would not, that habitually I do. Hence arises a great and growing need for assistance in the struggle against one's own evil dispositions, a need which grows with the perception of the power of the evil against which assistance is invoked. And not only for myself is help needed, but also for the world. Some things, the beliefs and practices of Nazism, for example, I believe to be really wicked; some states of society, those that entail social injustice, oppression and undeserved economic hardship, really worse than others. War again, it is obvious, is an evil thing and ought not to be. It is my bounden duty, then, to try to discredit Nazi philosophy and to put a stop to Nazi practices. It is also my duty to help in the struggle to replace an economically inequitable capitalist society by an economically equitable socialist society; it is also my duty to help in the struggle to eliminate war and to organize the world on a basis which gives some assurance of permanent peace. Now religion assures me that if I accept certain beliefs (on faith, if need be), practise certain disciplines, and train myself in the ways of virtue, I can establish relations between myself and the fundamental reality of the universe of which I form part, and that as a result certain desirable changes will take place in my own consciousness and character.

I have tried to put this in the most non-committal way possible. The Christian religion, of course, goes farther, and assures me that there is a personal God; that He loves me; that if I believe in Him and pray to Him for assistance he will help me in my struggle against the evil in myself, and also against the evil in the world.

There are, as I have tried to show, all manner of difficulties attaching to this conception of a personal God, but to postulate such a Being does at least satisfy the requirement that the universe should be a moral universe, and mitigates the otherwise intolerable fact of evil by giving some assurance of assistance in the struggle against it.

Here, then, was a definite incentive to accept the theistic hypothesis, at least to the extent of conducting my own life as if it were true, and thus applying the test of verification by results. Suppose, then, that I were to undertake some of the obligations which provisional acceptance of the hypothesis

entailed, for example, in the matter of discipline of self, consideration of others and resort to prayer, and so put myself in a position to see whether it worked. The proof of the pudding would, after all, be in the eating; one could see what happened and judge by what happened. Here, then, was a new motive, a motive of a personal kind, for passing beyond the position in which I had hitherto rested, which affirmed the existence of a number of static, inactive values, supplemented, it might be, by the aloof Aristotelian God, and accepting and acting upon the hypothesis of a personal and interested God. The motive was obvious. But the intellectual difficulties marshalled in the second and third chapters remained, and these difficulties as I have already explained, I have hitherto found overwhelming. Nor is my case peculiar. 'In our own day', writes Aldous Huxley, 'an increasing number of Europeans find it intellectually impossible to pay devotion to the supernatural *persons* who were the objects of worship during the counter-Reformation period. But the desire to worship persists, the process of worshipping still retains its attraction.'

Here, then, in a new form, was the antinomy which in the preceding pages I have tried in various connections to present; the antinomy between the desire of the heart and the arguments of the head. And it was here presented in its sharpest form. How could it be resolved? The most obvious method, argument having led to an *impasse*, was by a direct appeal to evidence.

And so I come at last to the question of the nature of the evidence for a personal God. Before I tackle it, there is an important preliminary question touching the nature and trustworthiness of the evidence on which something must be said.

#### *Note on Reasoning and Rationalizing.*

In the preceding paragraphs I have been concerned with the incentives to believe and the circumstances which predispose to belief. But the considerations which lead men to think a belief true are not the same as the reasons which demonstrate its truth. Motive, in other words, is not the same as evidence. Of the many considerations which may lead a man to hold a belief, most are subjective, and, because subjective, irrational. Thus the smoker believes that tobacco ash is good for the carpet, and the fisher-

man that fish, being cold-blooded, do not mind having their throats dragged out of them by hooks, or mind very little, because these beliefs satisfy their wishes or comfort their consciences. When we hold a belief to be true, not because we are convinced by the evidence for its truth, but because of the comfort or assurance it brings, the belief is not a reasoned, but a rationalized belief. Some psycho-analysts maintain that all our beliefs are rationalized in this sense, meaning by this that all beliefs are wishes veneered by reason. If the psycho-analysts are right, we always hold beliefs not because they are true, but because we wish to think them so. I do not agree with this view, and have criticized it elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> This is not the place for a re-statement of these criticisms. It is, however, clear to me that we do at least sometimes hold beliefs on evidence; that is to say, we hold beliefs that are directly contrary to our wishes for no reason at all except that the evidence compels belief. To cite an instance which has occurred within my own knowledge:—Mr. X came home from work to see a stranger rushing out of his house evincing every symptom of haste and agitation. Entering his house, Mr. X found that his wife had been assaulted and his child seriously injured. He dashed out into the street, calling on the neighbours for help, and a hue and cry was raised for the culprit. Presently, a man who had been seen running along the road was apprehended and was brought before Mr. X for identification. It so happened that he was Mr. X's cousin and was also his worst enemy. He had been his rival for his wife's hand, and was known by X to be animated by the most bitter hatred of himself, a hatred which X reciprocated. X had, it was obvious, the strongest possible grounds for believing his cousin to be the guilty man, and the strongest possible reasons for wishing him to be so. Nevertheless, in spite of the asseverations of the crowd who had seen the cousin running along the road at the relevant time, Mr. X persistently affirmed that his cousin was not the culprit. Why not? Because he had noticed that the man running out of his gate had three fingers missing from his left hand, while his cousin's left hand was intact. It will, I think, be generally agreed that cases of this kind, in which belief in a particular proposition is determined

<sup>1</sup> See my *Guide to Modern Thought*, Chapter VIII.

by the evidence and nothing but the evidence, in the face of the strongest incentive to believe some other proposition, do constantly occur. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that our beliefs *are very frequently* rationalizations of our wishes, and that it is often difficult to tell, in regard to a particular belief, whether it is held as the result of a dispassionate survey of the evidence in its favour, or whether it is the expression in consciousness of purely subjective and probably unconscious considerations, which take no account of evidence.

How are we to distinguish reasoned from rationalized beliefs? It is not easy to say. Two points are worth noticing which are frequently overlooked in discussions of the subject.

(i) The fact that a belief is subjectively determined does not mean that it is untrue; it may be a rationalization of our wishes and may, nevertheless, be in accordance with the evidence. Sometimes we are in the fortunate position of knowing that this is so. We may hold a belief to be true because we wish it to be true, and we may at a later date gratefully acknowledge that the evidence is strongly in its favour. It is by no means to be taken for granted that religious beliefs do not fall within this category. I make this point because many people argue as if it were sufficient to show that our religious beliefs are rationalizations in the sense of 'rationalization' already defined, in order to disprove them; as if the fact that religious beliefs fulfilled our wishes and comforted our feelings was *in itself* a reason for supposing them to be false.

(ii) Secondly, it may well be the case, as I have argued above<sup>1</sup> that the very fact that mankind is imbued with a disposition to believe, provided always that the disposition is sufficiently widespread and persistent, constitutes evidence in favour of the truth of the belief. It does not, of course, prove the belief to be true, but it does constitute evidence which is entitled to be regarded as relevant and to be taken into account. Our psychological traits, I have suggested, are not arbitrary, but point to and reflect the presence of objective factors in the environment in which we have evolved, and which may not unreasonably be supposed to have stamped their impress upon us. This consideration has a special bearing upon the question with which

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 6, pp. 215-217.

we are immediately concerned, the question whether we are justified in dismissing man's search for an ordering principle in the universe as *mere* wishful thinking. I will try to show exactly what the bearing of the consideration is.

*Men's Craving for Unity.*

All men feel thirst. The fact, it is obvious, is not arbitrary: it refers to and reflects a characteristic of the environment in which men have evolved, the fact, namely, that it contains water. Similarly, all or most men feel a desire for order and meaning in the universe. They are not satisfied for long with a philosophy of meaninglessness. In particular, they have shown an almost universal tendency to postulate a principle of unity behind the diversity of the phenomena with which their senses confront them. Sometimes they have regarded this principle as material, sometimes as mental or spiritual. Thus the Greek atomists conceived that underlying the diversity of all things, both material and mental, there was a single homogeneous material substance which they held to be composed of solid, homogeneous atoms. The philosopher Berkeley substituted a single homogeneous mental substance, the mind of God. So far as the material world is concerned, the conception of the Greek atomists, a conception which looked very like a rationalization of wishful thinking, has been verified.<sup>1</sup> The idea that a single material substance underlies all the diverse phenomena of sense is admirably calculated to satisfy the craving for order. It has also, as it happened, provided always that we are prepared to use the word 'substance' in a Pickwickian sense, been verified by experiment. Thus the wishful thinking of Democritus and Leucippus has become the established scientific fact of Boyle and Dalton.

The craving for a moral order in the universe is no less persistent than the craving for a homogeneous, material substance. Most moral philosophers have rationalized that craving into a moral principle at the heart of things, conceived either as a

<sup>1</sup> Or so nearly verified as not to affect the argument. In the nineteenth century it seemed to have been completely verified; the modifications which the twentieth century has introduced are from this point of view unimportant.



personal God or as a universal consciousness. Now it is no doubt true that in one sense this belief in a moral or spiritual principle is a rationalization of inborn needs, but we are no more entitled to dismiss it for that reason than men in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, before the atomic theory had been verified, were entitled to dismiss the speculations of Democritus. It is unlikely that the fact of a moral order will ever be verified in the same sense and in the same way as the sense and the way in which the fact of the atomic order has been verified. But if we are prepared, as I think we should be, to accept the inborn craving for the one as a piece of evidence pointing to, without demonstrating, the existence of that which the craving asserts and which would satisfy the craving, we should, I submit, be prepared to accord the same degree of evidential value to the inborn craving for the other.

With these preliminary remarks I come again to the question of evidence. Let us suppose that we were to imagine ourselves members of a jury who, having divested our minds, as far as we can, from predisposition and bias, were asked to address them to the question, 'What is the nature of the positive evidence for the existence of a personal and participating God, and how far is it entitled to our respect?'

### THE EVIDENCE FROM MYSTICISM

#### (i) *Varieties of Mystical Experience and Report.*

The most direct evidence for the existence of such a God is afforded by the experiences of the mystics. Briefly, the mystics' claim is that by following a certain way of life, by a process of self-education and self-discipline, and by the adoption and consistent maintenance of that attitude of mind (or spirit) known as faith, they have so refined and purified their consciousness, that they have achieved a direct experience of God. I have made this brief statement of the mystics' claim as colourless and as non-committal as possible. I have read a considerable amount of mystical literature, and it has convinced me of the unwisdom of trying to generalize even in the most colourless way, about a field of experience at once so profound, so obscure, and so various. I know, therefore, that my generalization is

inadequate, and that it requires to be amplified and particularized in all sorts of ways. I know, too, that so soon as one begins to particularize a great number of clarifications, qualifications and variations insist on being introduced. For example, one would have to take note of the fact that what I have called 'a certain way of life' usually includes a high proportion of good works, the conception of 'good works' being variously interpreted according to the ethical code of the religion to which the mystic happens to belong. One would have to add that some mystics would seem to have denied this and that, for them, the prescribed 'way of life' involved a withdrawal from intercourse with their fellows and an exclusive preoccupation with meditation and ascetic practices designed to clarify and purify their *own* spiritual consciousness. One would need to mention that the achievement of the 'direct experience of God' is not, as the phrase suggests, a one-sided process, in which, while the mystic is actively seeking and conscious, God remains a passive object of which the mystic at last succeeds in achieving consciousness; but that God, in addition to being other than and transcendent of the mystic's consciousness, is also present in that consciousness; and quickens and guides it in its search for Him. Indeed, if we were to take into account all the aspects of the mystical experience of God to which the different mystics have borne witness, we should have to envisage this experience as involving at least a three-fold relation. First, though the experience is knowledge of an object, the object is not passive but active in the sense that God permits Himself to be known, by deliberately revealing Himself to the mystic's vision; secondly, the object is also present in the soul of the subject upon which He, the object, confers grace in the shape of active assistance and guidance in the subject's quest for the experience which is an experience of Himself; it would be necessary to add that such assistance can only be invoked by, and vouchsafed in answer to, prayer. Thirdly, the experience is not one of pure knowledge in which the knower remains outside of and other than the known, but is an experience of a communion, even of a merging, of being, the knower entering into and being absorbed by the known. Thus the relation of the lover to the beloved affords in some way a better analogy than that of the subject knower to the object known.

Again, I know that many mystics, and more particularly eastern mystics, have denied that mystical experience reveals a person, or rather, they have intimated that it does so only in its earlier stages, and that the all-embracing impersonal consciousness which they appear to affirm as the object of their experience in the later stages, though it is capable of absorbing the soul of the experiencer, though it is in truth the living, inmost essence of that soul, is not capable of loving and helping the soul as a person can love and help.

But this is not a book on mysticism and I cannot here go farther into the fascinating questions raised by the variety of mystical experience and report, except in so far as they contribute to the answering of the question which at present concerns us, and which for the sake of clearness, I venture to repeat.

Let us, then, suppose that we imagine ourselves to be jurymen asked to consider and to test the validity of the testimony of the mystics, and more particularly to weigh the evidence which it affords for the existence of a personal God. To what conclusions should we be entitled to come? Most mystics affirm the existence of a reality which is very different from that with which our daily experience acquaints us. It is timeless and spaceless; it is spiritual; it is, according to some accounts, personal; and it is real in a sense in which the chairs and tables and living bodies of everyday life are not. They do not, however, succeed in describing this world to us, and when they try, their utterances are obscure to the point of meaninglessness. Many have concluded from this that the experiences described are subjective; they are not, the critics have maintained, the record of an objective world known by and revealed to the mystics; they are merely the outpourings of souls beside themselves with solitude and fasting. I think that this conclusion is invalid for two reasons. The first is concerned with the nature of communicability, the second arises from a reflection on the character and limitations of our knowledge of the familiar world.

(ii) (a) *The Question of Communicability.*

For the sake of simplicity I propose to assume that there are at least two different kinds of knowledge which I will call "reasoned" and "intuitive knowledge" respectively. I do not wish to suggest

that there are only these two kinds, or that the line between them is in all respects easy to draw, or that the two labels which I have given to them are not question-begging labels, or even that, from the point of view of question-begging, better labels might not be found. This is not a disquisition on the theory of knowledge, and I am concerned here to maintain only that there are these two broadly different ways of knowing something, that everybody is familiar with them, and that the labels which I have given to them will convey at least some meaning to most minds. Reasoned knowledge is that which is obtained by the process of reasoning, and, since the faculty of reason is the same in all of us (whether we have much of it or less) reasoned knowledge is public and, therefore, communicable. If, for example, I set out to demonstrate to you that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal, then, given that you are not an idiot, and given willingness on your part to attend and to try to understand, I will undertake to convince you, both that this is a fact, and also why it is a fact. In other words, I can communicate to you a piece of reasoned knowledge. Knowledge of this type might be assigned a place at the top of the scale of communicability.

Now let us take an example from the other end of the scale. Let us suppose that I have the toothache and inform you of the fact. Let us suppose, further, that you have never had the toothache. Then the information that I am trying to convey will be largely meaningless to you, and it will be so because there is no foundation of common experience, common, that is to say, both to you and to me, upon which I can build.

If you had never experienced any pain at all, then my statement would, I suppose, convey no meaning at all; but granted that you have had some pain, although not the particular kind of pain known as toothache, then although you will understand that I am suffering, I shall be unable to convey to you precisely what the quality of my suffering is. There must, I am suggesting, be some chord of memory in you in which my words can evoke sympathetic vibrations if you are to understand and to sympathize. Feeling, then, unlike reason, is private and personal, and one's ability to convey knowledge of what it is that one is feeling depends upon and is limited by the degree to which the person addressed has experienced a similar feeling.

Similarly with the emotions. We know, I suppose, in a sense, even as children, what love is or jealousy, but it is not until we have ourselves experienced them as adults or adolescents that, as we say, we know what they mean. We have to wait for our first experience of sexual intercourse before we know the meaning of such phrases as 'the expense of spirit in a waste of shame is lust in action', or even of 'all passion spent'. And has not the story of the young man who wished to 'inherit eternal life', and in particular the melancholy phrase with which it ends—'He went away sorrowful for he was one that had great possessions', taken on a new meaning for those of us who have watched with amazed admiration the application by the Russians of the 'scorched earth' policy and wondered whether we should have had the hardihood of their logic?

Intuitive knowledge would seem to occupy a rung upon the scale of communicability midway between reasoned knowledge and feeling. It is like reasoned knowledge in respect of the fact that it is in truth knowledge. I do, that is to say, *know* that Bach is better than jazz, and Cézanne a greater painter than the illustrator of the cover of a monthly magazine. I *do know* that X is a good man, unselfish and generous, and that Y is a bad one, cruel and mean. I *do know* that my friend is upset when the letter comes with the bad news. I know these things, that is to say, and I do not merely feel them; and I know them as certainly as I know that 3 and 2 make 5, or that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal. The fact that my knowledge may be erroneous is not to the point; I may have rational grounds for knowing things which turn out to be false, as when I know that the Prime Minister is So-and-So, through not having opened the paper which contains the news of his death. In all these respects, then, this knowledge which I am calling intuitive is like reasoned knowledge. But in one very important respect it is like feeling, and this is in respect of being incommunicable except to those who already share the experience on which it is based. I cannot, after all, give reasons for my conviction that Bach is better than jazz, or Cézanne than the illustrator. If I am challenged, I may bring forward a number of considerations in support of my view, but sooner or later there comes a point at which I am driven to say 'I feel it to be so; I see it to be so; cannot you feel and see

it too? If you cannot, then there is nothing more to be said'. And if the person I am trying to answer does not see it, if he is tone deaf, for example, or blind to the beauty of great pictures, then there is no more to be said. This knowledge that I believe myself to possess cannot, then, be communicated to somebody else who has not had experiences which are similar to those on which it is based.

Now the knowledge which the mystics profess seems to me to belong pre-eminently to this middle category. It is like feeling in the sense that it is a private and personal possession, incommunicable except to those who have already had some tincture of similar experience; yet it is in truth knowledge. The mystic *knows* that there is God, that he can approach God by prayer and meditation; and that God loves him; and the fact that this knowledge may not be true, is no more to the point than the fact that my knowledge that my friend is upset when he receives the bad news may not be true, is to the point.

I conclude that truths pertaining to those spheres in which feeling enters cannot be known, unless we have shared the feeling on which the knowledge is based, or rather, they can be known only in the sense that a schoolboy can learn by heart that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal, without understanding the reasons why they are equal. It is for this reason that Aristotle, while admitting that a boy could be a mathematician, denied that he could be a philosopher or a politician, since the boy could not have experienced the subject matter of philosophy and politics, which is human beings and their lives. 'The first principles of philosophy', he wrote, 'are derived from experience; the young can only repeat them without conviction of their truth, whereas the definitions of mathematics are easily understood'. Aristotle continues: 'The young are not fit to be students of politics for they have no experience of life and conduct, and it is these that supply the premises and subject matter of this branch of thought'.

Cardinal Newman develops this principle in his *Grammar of Assent*. 'How', he asks, 'shall I imbibe a sense of the peculiarities of the style of Cicero or Virgil, if I have not read their writings? or how shall I gain a shadow of a perception of the wit or the grace ascribed to the conversation of the French salons, being myself an untravelled John Bull? . . . Not all the possible descriptions

of headlong love will make me comprehend the delirium, if I never have had a fit of it; nor will ever so many sermons about the inward satisfaction of strict conscientiousness create in my mind the image of a virtuous action and its attendant sentiments, if I have been brought up to lie, thief and indulge my appetites. Thus we meet with men of the world who cannot enter into the very idea of devotion, and think, for instance, that, from the nature of the case, a life of religious seclusion must be either one of unutterable dreariness or abandoned sensuality, because they know of no exercise of the affections but what is merely human; and with others again, who, living in the home of their own selfishness, ridicule as something fanatical and pitiable the self-sacrifices of generous high-mindedness and chivalrous honour. They cannot create images of these things, any more than children on the contrary can of vice, when they ask whereabouts and who the bad men are; for they have no personal memories, and have to content themselves with notions drawn from books or from what others tell them.'

*The Limitations of Language.*

The mystics, of course, attempt to 'tell them'. They attempt that is to say, to communicate to others what they have experienced and to convince them of the reality of the world that they have experienced. But this attempt is beset with enormous difficulties. The reality revealed to the mystic is *ex-hypothesi* other than that of the everyday world; in particular, it is a supernatural, not a natural reality. Now language has grown up in response to biological needs. One of the most important of its original functions was to enable men to refer to that which was not actually present to their senses. The dog can 'refer' to the rabbit hiding in the bush which is immediately in front of me, by routing it out; but he can say nothing about the rabbit in the wood. The dumb man can show me the morning paper by pointing to it, but he cannot tell me that it is in the drawer at the office. I do not wish to suggest that this is the only function which language was evolved to perform, but it is obviously a very important one, and will serve to illustrate a general truth about language, which is that it is a medium of communication designed to refer to the objects and to convey the meanings

appropriate to this world. This world is, in its most obvious description, a world of physical things extended in space, and language, therefore, is admirably designed to convey information about physical things. One of the reasons why the physical are the most advanced of the sciences is that language is, or has been, an instrument admirably adapted to their purposes. (It is no accident that modern physics gets into difficulties directly its concepts pass beyond a world of objects situated at a place at a time. Its most recent concepts are strictly indescribable in and, therefore, incommunicable by ordinary language. Hence in part the difficulty and obscurity of modern physics.) When its use is extended beyond the reference to physical things, language can serve the purpose of communication only when it conveys meanings in terms of concepts related to and derived from this world in terms, for example, of the concept of civilization, which is in the last resort about men, their tastes, and their behaviour, or the concept of democracy, which is about men and their government. But because it is now dealing with concepts which lie outside the realm of physical things in space, the precision of language as a means of communication is already at this, the conceptual stage, very much less. Most discussions about politics and ethics are doomed to futility from the first by reason of the fact that their participants are using the same words in different senses, yet are ignorant of the fact. To realize the inadequacy of language as an instrument for the communication of abstract meanings, which nevertheless relate to the things of this world, one cannot do better than read Stuart Chase's admirable book *The Tyranny of Words*. To correct that inadequacy, the reader is enjoined to address himself to the new study of Semantics which Mr. Chase expounds.

If language is beset by these difficulties when it seeks to convey abstract meanings derived from this world, what success, it may be asked, is it likely to have in conveying the meanings belonging to another? The answer is that it succeeds very ill. The best that the mystic can do is to make abundant use of similes, metaphors, images and myths, in which the things and actions of this world are used to symbolize those of another, in the hope that some germ of his meaning may find lodgement in the minds of those whom he is addressing. And so it may, if



the soil is already fertilized by experiences not wholly other than those whose meaning the mystic is seeking to convey. But if it is not so fertilized, then the mystic with his talk of a 'dazzling darkness', a 'delicious desert', 'the drop in the ocean and the ocean in the drop' seems to be merely babbling. It may be that, given the limitations of language, the mystics would have done better to hold their peace. 'If Mr. X', says Dr. Johnson somewhere, speaking of a metaphysical poet, 'has experienced the unutterable, Mr. X will be well advised not to try and utter it.'

However this may be, the fact that mystics convey no intelligible account of their experiences to most of us does not, if the foregoing considerations have any validity, mean that their experiences are necessarily subjective, or that the order of reality which they purport to describe does not exist. On the contrary, it would seem not unplausible to suppose that the only knowledge which it is possible to obtain of a reality which transcends this world is precisely of the undemonstrable, or, as I have called it, the intuitive kind. It may well, therefore, be the case that the whole issue between a meaningful and a meaningless universe and, if the universe be meaningful, between the theistic and other kinds of meaningfulness, is one which cannot be decided by what Hume called 'abstract reasoning'. The most that 'abstract reasoning' can do is to render one hypothesis more plausible than another. This initial plausibility can be still further strengthened by what Hume called 'experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact or evidence', but for this there must first be experience of the fact. Thus in the last resort it is experience and only experience that can certify the so-called truths of religion, and of relevant experiences the most direct and well authenticated examples are the experiences of the mystics.

(ii) (b) *The Nature of Our Knowledge of the Familiar World.*

The relevance of such knowledge arises in the following way. One of the reasons why men have doubted whether the world which the mystics affirm exists, is because it is so totally unlike the world of everyday. It is largely for this reason that they are disposed to dismiss the mystics' experience as subjective and the world they affirm an illusion.

The slightest acquaintance with science and philosophy

should be sufficient to show that the reality of the world of everyday is the slenderest of straws upon which to rest such a dismissal. In a previous chapter<sup>1</sup> I have commented adversely upon the standard of reality which limits the conception of the real to the tangible and the visible and shown that this standard is an accidental by-product of a particular stage in the development of the physical sciences. It is possible, by philosophical methods, to show that the external world consists of ideas, or is a unity of knowledge, or a collection of sense data, or a colony of souls. What is reasonably certain is that it does not consist of commonsense objects extended in space. It is reasonably certain, then, that such objects afford no standard of reality by reference to which the mystics' world can be convicted of unreality.

Even if we were to assume that the world revealed to us by our senses was a real world, it is, it is obvious, only a selection from total reality, the selection being conditioned by the nature of our sense organs. We cannot perceive electro-magnetic vibrations more frequent than those into which the colour violet is resolved, or less frequent than those which constitute the colour red. We cannot hear sounds above a certain pitch. A dog's world must be very different from ours, and an earwig's from a dog's. It is reasonably certain that the faculties of the bee and the ant introduce them to very different selections from the real world. Every species, in fact, inhabits a home-made section of reality, carved out from the whole by his sense organs and faculties. Even within that home-made section that we call reality we have no assurance that the qualities we perceive are those which it really possesses. For how fluctuating and variable those qualities are. As Plato pointed out, they vary according to the physiological conditions prevailing in the observer. The water which appears to me to be hot when I come in from a blizzard, appears tepid if I have just left a liner's stoke-hole. Alcohol doubles objects and colours the spectacles through which I view my future with a roseate tinge; drugs have sensational effects upon my perceptual apparatus. If I take opium, the sensible world fades away and is replaced by an infinitely more desirable reality in which I enjoy celestial visions, and engage, if I am fortunate, in heavenly conversation with God and His angels.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 4, pp. 115-117.

I have only to raise my temperature a few degrees and the world begins to look different. It *feels* even more different than it looks. Those who have lain in bed with high temperatures will remember how acutely sensitive the sense of touch becomes and the discoveries they made in regard to the hitherto unnoticed texture of their sheets. Suffering from a temperature of 102 degrees one felt more in them and more of them than one ever felt before, just as when one looks through a microscope one sees more in things and more of them than one ever saw before. Now it is difficult to believe that reality is limited to the world which is revealed to the sense organs of the bodies of Nordic adults heated to a temperature of 98.4 degrees Fahrenheit.

There are physiological practices whose object is so to alter the condition of the body that the perceptions of consciousness are modified in desirable ways. In the east these practices are studied and deliberately embarked upon; they include fasting and solitude, but their most salient features consist of the control of breathing and of rhythmic movements, as exemplified in the dance or in the solitary pacing to and fro of the Catholic priest. By these and other means the devotees of Yoga claim so to modify and to heighten the consciousness that they can lose the perception of the everyday world and penetrate through it to the spiritual world of which it is the veil. To assert that this claim is *necessarily* invalid, involves a degree of parochial assurance of which I confess myself incapable.

### (iii) *The Nature of the Testimony.*

For the reasons given in (ii) (a) above it seems probable that any attempt to describe in precise terms the nature of the reality which the mystics claim to be revealed to them, must be hopelessly misleading. Nevertheless, it is worth while to make the attempt, if only because of the surprising uniformity of testimony which it discloses. Mystics living in widely different times and places, members of very different civilizations, have broadly subscribed to the following affirmations.

First, that the universe is a unity, and therefore, that separation and division as, for example, between body and mind, between one mind and another, or between appearance and reality, are illusory.

Secondly, that evil is in the last resort illusory and arises from the partial view of the whole taken by our finite minds. In the mystical vision this partial view is corrected.

Thirdly, that time is unreal and that reality is eternal in the sense that it is outside time.

Fourthly, that reality consists of a universal spiritual consciousness. Whether this consciousness is to be conceived in personal or impersonal terms is a point upon which the mystics differ.

### *The Question of Personality.*

The difference is of the highest significance for the theme of this book, and I propose to devote some space to a consideration of it. While the western mystics have usually described the content of their vision in language appropriate to a person, the eastern mystics have tended to omit the conception of personality. Some, more explicit, have hinted that the vision of reality as personal belongs only to a comparatively early stage of the mystical experience. As the power of awareness grows and the mystic becomes more adept, the revelation of a person disappears from his vision. To penetrate deeper into the nature of reality is not, on this view, to know God better, but to be absorbed in a universal consciousness which is not the consciousness of any person. This universal consciousness is also revealed as the inmost core of the mystic's own being. Thus, for the Hindu mystic, to be merged in the universal reality is also to discover the self; the true self, that is to say, which already participates—or rather, since reality is outside time, which timelessly participates—in the universal consciousness which is reality, and from which the ego-centric consciousness of the individual person who inhabits the familiar world of everyday, has become falsely separated as a result of the presence of that irreducible element of many-ness, the source of division, of illusion, and of evil, which, as I have already pointed out<sup>1</sup>, no religious doctrine seems to have succeeded in entirely eliminating from its scheme of the universe.

The dominant eastern tradition on this point is fairly clear. It is that there are two selves, a real self and a fragmentary and temporary self. The real self is part of and continuous with the universal consciousness which is reality. The partial temporary

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 106-108.

self is separated from it and lives in a fictitious and semi-real world. Dominated by wrong desires, it seeks to enhance its fictitious individuality by communion with the things of the fictitious world which it inhabits, nourishing itself by the satisfaction of its appetites, and perpetuating itself by the pursuit and realization of its ambitions. The path of wisdom is to cross the gulf which separates the unreal from the real self in order to discover the real self, and in so doing to become one with reality, that is to say, with the universal consciousness of which the real self forms part. This is a difficult undertaking and can rarely be completely performed in this life. He who would set about it must begin disassociating himself from the desires and cravings appropriate to this world, cultivating detachment from its honours and prizes, and divesting his consciousness of everything that makes for the perpetuation and enhancement of his own fictitious self.

Individuality, then, on this view is both evil and fictitious, and the individual soul is bidden to break the bonds of the separateness in which its individuality consists and merge itself in the timeless universal. In this sense, the individual soul is not immortal since the timeless universal consciousness with which it is merged is not that of a personal God. Such in brief seems to be the teaching of the Hindu religion.

I have no qualifications for speaking of these difficult matters and propose, therefore, to supplement this bald account of the main tenets of Eastern mysticism with a couple of quotations from Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means*. First, in reinforcement of the contention that the view of reality as a personal God belongs only to the early stages of mystical experience, Huxley writes as follows:

'Those who take the trouble to train themselves in the arduous technique of mysticism always end, if they go far enough in their world of recollection and meditation, by losing their intuitions of a personal God and having direct experience of an ultimate reality that is impersonal. The experience of the great mystics of every age and country is there to prove that the theology associated with *bhakti-marga*<sup>1</sup> is inadequate, that it misrepresents the nature of ultimate reality. Those who persist in having emotional

<sup>1</sup> This is the name given in Hindu mythology to the Path of Devotional Faith in religion as a means to the improvement and purification of the self, as opposed to *karma-marga*, the Path of Duty or Works.

relationships with a God whom they believe to be personal are people who have never troubled to undertake the arduous training which alone makes possible the mystical union of the soul with the integrating principle of all being.'

If we ask what it is that the mystic who has mastered the arduous technique finds, the answer is,

'That which he discovers beyond the frontiers of the average sensual man's universe is a spiritual reality underlying and uniting all apparently separate existents—a reality with which he can merge himself and from which he can draw moral and even physical powers which, by ordinary standards, can only be described as supernormal.'

Again,

'The experience known to selves who choose to fulfil the ethical and intellectual conditions upon which it is possible for an individual to pass to another level of being, is not their own emotion, their own volition, their own knowledge, but an unnamed and perhaps indescribable consciousness of a different kind, a consciousness in which the subject-object relation no longer exists and which no longer belongs to the experiencing self.'

I am not competent to pronounce upon this contention. Indeed it would be both presumptuous and foolish for anyone to do so who is himself without the experience upon which judgement can alone be based. I venture, however, to offer certain comments which seem to me to be relevant to a discussion of this difficult issue, although they are far from determining its decision.

*Discussion of the Issues Raised by the View of Reality as a Universal Consciousness and not a Personal God.*

(a) The substitution of a universal impersonal consciousness for a personal and interested God does not help to solve the difficulties advanced in the second and third chapters. It does not enable us to understand the problem of evil and it does not enable us to understand the problem of motive. In fact the problem of motive becomes more and not less incomprehensible on this alternative supposition. For a personal God can at least be credited with motives expressing themselves in willed acts—motives are the sort of things that a person has; willing is the sort of thing that a person does—even if it is impossible for us to

understand what motive he could have had in creating this world. But it is difficult to see how a universal consciousness could motivate or will anything. If it could not, it could not motivate or will the creation of the fictitious world of appearance.

Thus the familiar world of everyday must be regarded, not as a creation, but as an appearance or expression, of the universal consciousness. But against such a supposition the arguments advanced in the critical discussion of monism, contained in Chapter 3, apply with great force. Either the familiar world is *wholly* illusory, or it is not. If it is wholly illusory, then we are wholly figments, and it is difficult to see what substance there can be in the contention that we have two selves, an illusory and a real, seeing that the illusory self is wholly non-existent. It is also difficult to see how a wholly illusory self could be related to a wholly real one. Presumably, then, there must be a relation between the reality and the appearance, and because of this relation the appearance cannot be *wholly* illusory. But here a new difficulty arises. Is the relation close or distant? If close, then all the features of appearance which the mystics most dislike will be reflections of more fundamental features in reality. If remote, what we know about the world of appearance will not enable us to deduce conclusions in regard to the world of reality, and the fictitious self will be unable to reach any conclusions of importance with regard to the real one. Indeed, it is on this view extremely difficult to see how the fictitious self can know that there is a real one or that it is an aspect of the real one.

But it is what I have called the 'something other'<sup>1</sup> argument which seems to me to constitute the greatest stumbling block to the supposition that a universal consciousness which is wholly real could, unqualified by any other factor, give rise to or permit itself to be expressed in a semi-real world of appearance, or, to use Buddhist terminology, to the supposition that a universe without desire could express itself in beings that desired. Can reality, one wonders, become less real than itself, or can desire be generated from nothing and in nothing?

I conclude that in point of logical difficulty the universal consciousness hypothesis has no advantage over the personal God hypothesis; on the contrary, the difficulties which it entails are

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 106-108.

not less, but, if possible, more overwhelming. I have read fairly widely in Hindu philosophy and am acquainted with some of the attempts that have been made to meet these difficulties. The best known of these attempts finds expression in the doctrine of *Maya*, a word used to denote the world of phenomena and usually translated in English as 'illusion'. But this doctrine only brings up in another form the difficulties which have been discussed in Chapter III. For example, to say that the world of phenomena is pure illusion is obviously nonsense, for I at least *think* that it is real. Now, if it is in fact an illusion, my view of it as real is an error. Either this error is itself illusion or it is real. Since it occurs in my mind, which is a member of the world of phenomena, the error is presumably illusory. The error which I make, therefore, in thinking that the world of phenomena is real is not a real error, but an illusory one and the world of phenomena is, therefore—since it is not really a mistake, to think it illusory—presumably real. If, however, we adopt the other alternative and say that the error in my mind is itself real, then error belongs to the nature of reality.

The world of phenomena cannot, then, it would seem, be purely illusory. What then is it? Some apparently hold that *Maya* should be translated as 'mystery' and say that this mystery, a mystery which can never be understood, lies in the *relation* of the world of phenomena to the Absolute Reality. But this is to give up, instead of solving, the basic problem which Hindu philosophy raises. Abhedananda refers to *Maya* as the 'Divine Energy' of the Brahmin, the energy in virtue of which the Brahmin evolves from out of His own nature 'time, space and causation, as also the phenomenal appearances which exist on the relative plane'. Does, then, the Absolute Reality produce something which is less real than itself, or can that which is absolute truth be also the source of the being of that which is at least partially illusory? These difficulties seem to me to be insuperable.

(b) Whatever evidence may exist, none can be *communicated* in favour of either hypothesis, except to those whose own experience has already testified its truth. Many mystics have affirmed direct intercourse with a living God who spoke to them, comforted them, tormented them by withdrawing from them, yet loved them. Many mystics have also reported the loss of personal individuality through absorption in an all-pervading universal



consciousness; but for the reasons given above,<sup>1</sup> the testimony of neither party carries weight with those who have not shared the experience on which it is based. For those, therefore, who are themselves without direct mystical experience there is and can be no decisive method of deciding between these two conflicting sets of testimony. The evidence in the one case is as good, or as bad, as it is in the other. In the circumstances, the doubtful enquirer is thrown back upon his own judgement of probability; and thrown back in a situation in which it is only too likely that the judgement will be determined at least in part by his wishes.

(c) For it is precisely at this point that the question of wish fulfilment intrudes itself in its most disquieting form. That our judgements of probability are often rationalizations of our wishes is obvious. If they are rationalizations, there is a presumption<sup>2</sup> that they are no more than rationalizations, since the wish to think a belief true often constitutes a reason for thinking that it is true. Conclusions into the formation of which our wishes enter must always be regarded with suspicion, since, if it be the case that the wish to think a belief true is accepted, albeit unconsciously, as a reason for thinking the belief to be true, then there will be a tendency to hold the belief without demanding *any other reason*, without, therefore, demanding that particular reason which is that the belief should square with the evidence.

Now if Christianity is right, there are inducements of the strongest order for believing in God. Christianity makes a merit of belief. The mere fact of believing is a sign of virtue, the failure to believe, of wickedness. Also the wicked are persecuted.

Moreover, the advantages of belief are presented in the vividest colours. The believer in God will be comforted; he will also be strengthened; he will also be saved, and he will find peace. Indeed, it is only the believers who are saved and find peace. 'Let not your heart be troubled,' says Jesus, in the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel according to Saint John, 'ye believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you.'

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 244-248.

<sup>2</sup> It is *only* a presumption, a presumption which, if the conclusion reached in (i) on page 240 can be accepted, may be misleading.

Who, in the circumstances, would refuse the place? If to believe in Christ is to be saved, who would be such a fool as to withhold belief? The only possible answer can be 'The man who cares for truth, believes only on evidence, and in this particular case does not find the evidence convincing. He alone in such circumstances will withhold belief.' Thus we get an apparent opposition between belief in a personal God which we have the strongest inducements to think true, and disbelief in Him, in favour of which there can be no reason whatever except that it is in accordance with the evidence, or rather with the lack of evidence.

On the other hand, the inducements to believe in a universal consciousness are not impressive. A universal consciousness cannot strengthen, console, help, alter the course of events in ways congenial to the believer, or respond to prayer. In fact, I doubt if it is accessible to prayer. Therefore, it would seem, there can be no reason for believing in the universal consciousness as opposed to the personal God, except such reasons as may be based on evidence and probability.

The foregoing considerations certainly seem at first sight to point in favour of the hypothesis of a universal, impersonal consciousness and away from the hypothesis of a personal God. I do not think, however, that they are conclusive.

#### *Arguments in Favour of the Belief in a Personal God.*

Let us look a little more closely at this question of inducement. That there is an incentive to believe in a personal God, an incentive which priests have perverted until it has become a bribe, is undoubted. Believe, they have said, and you will be happy in heaven; disbelieve, and you run the risk of being tortured in hell. But the bribe is only a bribe, the warning only a threat to those who do already believe. If you do not already hold the belief, you are not attracted by heaven, or frightened by hell since, for you, there are no such places. In other words, the bribery and the blackmail are only effective provided that the belief which they are designed to promote is already accepted. To put the point logically, the realization of the end they are designed to promote must be presupposed as a condition of the effectiveness of their promotion of it. I doubt, then, whether the wish-fulfilment motive is as strong as is suggested. No doubt in a case in which the

independent evidence seems to us to be equal, the fact that belief brings certain specific advantages may tip the scales. If there is only a reasonable chance that the Christian hypothesis is true, then, it may be said, we have every incentive to take the chance.

Admitted! Yet I doubt if this calculating attitude, appropriate to the appraising of an insurance risk, although no doubt the Church has all too often been prone to foster it—the Church of England, as a wit recently remarked, is nothing but ‘a gigantic fire insurance society’—has brought many to God. It might do so if believing in God were a purely reasoned process in the sense of ‘reasoned’<sup>1</sup> defined above, but, as I have argued, the belief in God derives its compelling power at least in part from intuitive processes of which reason can give no account. Moreover, even if the belief in God is largely the outcome of human need, the fact and the prevalence of the need constitute, as I have already pointed out,<sup>2</sup> considerations which may be accepted as evidence in favour of the belief. Our needs, I have argued, are not purely arbitrary, but must be explained by reference to the cosmic environment, in which we have developed. It is difficult to conceive that a belief so widespread and so persistent should be meaningless in the sense of being a belief in nothing.

In my own case it was, as I have described, a definite need of the heart which led to a reconsideration of the whole theistic hypothesis, and a reopening of questions which, for many years, I had regarded as closed. More precisely, it was the conviction of the reality of evil uncombined with any assurance of assistance in the endeavour to combat and overcome it, that prompted an enquiry undertaken in the definite hope—for let me make once and for all open confession of the wishes, which I am trying to satisfy—that good grounds would be found for accepting the hypothesis of a personal and interested God. I want strengthening and comforting with a strength that I cannot provide for myself, with a comfort that must come from without, if I am to find life tolerable in a world as ugly and as menacing as this one has become. This need for strength and comfort will not be satisfied by the blind affirmation that evil is an illusion, that my troubles are unreal because the world in which they occur is unreal, and that I may one day hope to lose my tormented

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 244, 245.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 6, 215-218.

individuality through absorption in a universal consciousness. It demands rather for its satisfaction the help and love of a God to Whom I can communicate my distress and with Whom I can make contact in prayer. Therefore, since as I have said, the evidence in favour of either hypothesis is equal, and since a choice must, nevertheless, be made, I opt definitely for the hypothesis that has for me the greatest attraction.

On one point, however, it seems to me that what I have called the dominant Eastern view has the advantage. I have always found difficulty in accepting the perpetuation of human individuality. And not only difficulty but repugnance; the notion that I with all my faults of character and person, and with all my consciousness of my faults should continue to exist as a person for ever is for me forbidding in the last degree. I echo the sentiments of Adam in the first play of Shaw's *Back to Methuselah* pentateuch. Is it unreasonable for those of us who are sensible of the same disgust at the prospect of the indefinite perpetuation of ourselves, even of our 'saved' selves, to borrow from the Eastern view to the extent of supposing that at death our personalities are merged with God, so that our separate *egos*, lost in the infinity of God's person, cease to exist. The idea has had its attraction for many westerners. Thus Dante, for all his medieval theology, speaks with solemn fervour of 'the great sea of being', and his vision of Paradise is less that of a place than of a state in which the being of the individual will be wholly blended with that of God. Such a condition according to our human standards would be as complete an absorption of individuality as the Hindu states of beatitude and Nirvana.

The same conception appealed to Meredith. A visitor during his last illness records how he spoke of himself as having been hurled over a cataract, and having been caught first on one ledge and then on another. 'And now', he said, 'I am waiting for the last plunge into the great, deep pool of all-being.'

Reality, on this view, is a person to the extent that reality is a Being who assists, comforts and watches over humanity during its period on earth, but, when that period is over, the individual soul loses its individuality through absorption in the infinity of that Being. The conception, I admit, is vague, but it seems to me to include the advantages of both of the views discussed.

(d) *The Personality of God.*

But here a qualification must be introduced. I have read many disquisitions on the subject of God's personality. Their method is to deduce the attributes of God from certain general principles whose truth is taken to be self-evident; as, for example, that God cannot change; that He cannot experience need or want; that He does not feel desire; that He cannot deceive, and so on. The considerations advanced on these and other topics are erudite and closely argued, but they do not seem to me to rise above the level of speculation. Sometimes the speculation leads to fantastic conclusions. Here is an example of a conclusion that seems to me fantastic. We are told that God loves man and, because He loves him, will help him, if he humbly and believingly craves God's help, and strengthen him so that he may overcome temptation. And, because God loves man, God we are assured, also needs man to love Him. But we are also asked to conceive of God as perfect. How, then, it is asked—as I have asked in an earlier chapter—can God feel need, since need implies want or lack? More particularly, how can He need man's love or need man to love? The difficulty is met by supposing—the solution is, I believe, a traditional one, though I take this particular statement of it from Mr. C. S. Lewis's book *The Problem of Pain*—that God, initially needless, deliberately generates in Himself the need to love and to be loved and then creates man to satisfy it. This is how Mr. Lewis puts it:

'If God sometimes speaks as though the Impassible could suffer passion and eternal fullness could be in want, and in want of those beings on whom it bestows all, from their bare existence upwards, this can mean only, if it means anything intelligible by us, that God of mere miracle has made Himself able so to hunger and created in Himself that which we can satisfy. If He requires us, the requirement is of His own choosing. If the immutable heart can be grieved by the puppets of its own making it is Divine Omnipotence, no other, that has so subjected it, freely, and in a humility that surpasses understanding. If the world exists not chiefly that we may love God, but that God may love us, yet that very fact, on a deeper level, is so for our sakes. If He who in Himself can lack nothing chooses to need us, it is because we need to be needed.'

I do not wish to soil the conclusion of this blameless reasoning by comment; I cite it only as an example of what I call a fantastic speculation.

It seems to me that on this question of the nature of God's personality only one general principle can quite certainly be affirmed, which is, that if God is a personality, He is so only by courtesy title. For He must, it seems to me, be so very much more. To think of Him as a personality and to leave it at that, is to think of Him as being at best a very good, very wise, and very powerful man from whom all imperfections have been removed. I say 'at best', because much more often in the history of human thought it has been to think of Him not only as human, but as all too human, as possessing, that is to say, not the qualities of the best possible, but those of the average man. With their jealousy, their wilfulness, their resentfulness, their touchiness and their vindictiveness, most of the gods whom human beings have invoked have been admirable reflections of the jealousy, the wilfulness, the resentfulness, the touchiness and vindictiveness of their creators. Particularly is this true of the tribal God of the Old Testament. The results have been disastrous, since these assumed attributes of God have been used to justify more jealousy, more wrath and more revenge on the part of His worshippers, on the ground that such emotions and the acts in which they find expression were pleasing to God.

Now it may be true that God permits Himself to be conceived as a personality, but if so, His personality can be at most only one aspect of the whole that He is.

I have suggested that goodness, truth and beauty are aspects of God under which He reveals His nature to man, so that in pursuing truth, we draw nearer to God, in knowing beauty, we know something about God, in doing our duty, experience something akin to His experience. But nobody would, I imagine, wish to suggest that God is beauty or is goodness or is truth. In the same way, it seems to me, God may be a spirit, one aspect of whose being may be not inappropriately conceived after the model of an infinitely good, wise and powerful person; but to suppose that God was such a person would be like supposing that an object was the shadow which the object cast. The object is expressed in the shadow, but it is not the shadow. Similarly,

to revert to a metaphor used above, the policy of the government is not the same as any one of the legislative acts in which it finds expression. Nevertheless, these acts are in truth informed by it, and from a study of them something of its nature can be discerned. In saying, then, that God may be not inappropriately conceived as a person, we must be careful to guard ourselves against anthropomorphism by adding that He may be so conceived as one among all the other things which He also is—most, perhaps all of these, being inconceivable.

But whether He is in fact a person or not, and if He is, what sort of person, and what are the things He is besides being a person, only those who have had direct experience of Him can know and they, as I have tried to show, cannot tell us what they know. And herein, I take it, lies the significance of the extremely vague expressions used to denote God's nature in the Bible. 'God is a spirit,' says Saint John; of Himself in Exodus, He says, 'I am that I am', while the Articles of Religion adopted by the English Church assert that He is, 'without body, parts or passions'.

(iv) *The Validity of the Testimony.*

I come now to the most difficult question that arises in this discussion, the question, namely, what reason is there to think that the mystics are not deceived, deceived not in respect of the fact that they have experience, but in respect of the interpretation that they place upon it? May it not be that the vision which they believe themselves to perceive is nothing but a figment projected by their own consciousness, a consciousness excited by solitude and fevered by fasting. The mystics believe that their vision is a window through which they behold the outlines of reality. But suppose that it is only a mirror in which they behold the reflection of themselves? Suppose that there is no reality except the familiar world of our daily experience, that the universe, therefore, is meaningless, and that the visions which religious people have believed themselves to see upon its canvas are those which their own imaginations have projected? Even if we accept the conclusions of the argument against subjectivism reached in the preceding chapter, to the extent of conceding that the subjectivist interpretation need not *necessarily* and *always* be true, how do we know that in the case of mystics it is not in fact true?

The difficulty of these questions arises from the impossibility of finding a satisfactory answer. I have suggested that the knowledge achieved by the mystics is not reasoned and demonstrative, but immediate and intuitive. If I am right, it cannot be demonstrated to others who have not shared the experience upon which it is based, nor can it even be demonstrated that such knowledge does occur. We are driven back here upon personal experience. If there is in us any trace of experience, however fragmentary, to which the mystic can address himself, then we shall not feel disposed to dismiss his claim, however little we may understand the content of his statement; if not, it will seem to us to be no more than vapouring and dogma.

*Moral Experience and Endeavour.*

Now, the truth is that most of us have, at some time or other, enjoyed some analogous experience which has left behind its deposit of memory. Let us take, first, the case of moral experience. History is studded with the names of men and women from Saint Francis to Madame Curie, from Father Damien to Dr. Schweitzer, who have devoted the major part of their lives to the selfless service of their fellows. In all of us there flickers, however feebly, the desire to help suffering men and women, and a determination to leave the world a little better than we found it. Moreover, all of us have our moments of service, moments in which we are prepared actually to sacrifice a certain amount—a certain very small amount—of personal comfort or convenience to help somebody in trouble, or to promote a cause which we know to be good. I am not, of course, suggesting either that the desire to help and serve is always or even often gratified, or that it is not overlaid and finally buried under the weight of purely self-regarding desires. I am affirming that the desire does, especially in youth, exist. Those who experience it—if the avowal will not set the reader against me, I should like to add, I myself, in so far as I have experienced it—have told how in experiencing the impulse to serve mankind they have experienced also the conviction that the impulse owned a source in something outside and greater than their own personal good.

Similarly with moral endeavour. Is it not the case that, as the Abbé Huvelin, quoted by von Hügel, puts it, 'when something



very high and inaccessible is put before human nature, it feels itself impelled to attain to that height by something mysterious and divine which God infuses into the soul? In such cases it is difficult not to feel—and I emphasize the word 'feel', for we are here in a realm beyond that of reason—that contact has been made, if only for a moment, with something beyond and greater than the self which touches the self and, touching it, causes the self to respond by aspiration and endeavour. Life, as William James insists, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, wears at times the aspect of a fight as though something were being definitely won or lost by our spiritual success or failure. If we look back upon the highest moments of our own experience, surely most of us must agree that once at least, in love, in death, in the perception of beauty, or in deep moral struggle, we have made contact with realms that are not material, and that it is in our periods of moral and spiritual activity that we come as close as ever we can come to reality, that unknown something which lies behind the changing show of facts upon which our minds feed and the stimuli which provoke the life of our senses.

It is, however, in connection with art that such experience comes easiest to most men and women in the twentieth century. Consider, for example, the implications of the following extract from a letter from Roger Fry to Robert Bridges, which is printed in Virginia Woolf's *Biography of Roger Fry*.

'One can only say that those who experience it' (the aesthetic emotion) 'feel it to have a peculiar quality of "reality" which makes it a matter of infinite importance in their lives. Any attempt I might make to explain this would probably land me in the depths of mysticism.'

### *The Musical Experience.*

Most of us would probably be prepared to agree with Fry, yet owing to the difficulties of language we should find ourselves hard put to it to give reasons for our agreement. In the aesthetic connection, and broadly only in this connection, I am sensible as would-be communicator of the difficulty of which, in other connections, I am conscious only as the would-be recipient of the communications of others. More particularly in the enjoyment of musical experience, I am, I believe, conscious of that sense of the

'peculiar quality of "reality"' to which Roger Fry refers. This consciousness is highly relevant to my present theme, since it has played as large a part as any other single factor in producing the change of attitude which is responsible for the writing of this book, the truth of the matter being that I am disposed to take a sympathetic view of the reports of the mystics and to accord to them a high degree of significance for the interpretation of reality, largely because, perhaps only because, of the spiritual deposit which has been laid down in my own life by the experience of music. For this belongs, I believe, and belongs recognizably to the same family of experience as their own, albeit to a distant branch of poor relations.

A word of personal explanation may at this point be pardoned.

*Author's Musical Pilgrimage.*

I was brought up without contact with first-rate music. There was plenty of good music available at Oxford, but I refrained from listening to it. I refrained from listening even to the Balliol concerts, where good music was offered gratuitously to undeserving undergraduates. I was, indeed, an attender at a number of these concerts, but, though an attender, it cannot be said that in any significant sense of the word I was a listener. The music meant little or nothing to me, and such pleasure as I derived had its springs less in the music than in myself. In other words, it was the pleasure of day-dreaming; the pleasure of escaping from reality into a world of sound. My imagination, quickened by the music, but not directed upon it, would conjure up a host of visions in which I saw myself in a variety of ennobling situations, leading lost causes, rescuing imprisoned damsels, crusading for forlorn hopes, magnanimously forgiving those who had wronged, or triumphing, again magnanimously, over those who had slighted me. There were features about these flights of imagination which recalled the daydreams of childhood, for it is when we are children, if I remember aright, that we so graciously forgive upon our imagined death-beds, the parents who have so persistently misunderstood us. The effect, then, of music upon me at this stage was that of a catalyst which released the stored accumulation of my own memories and dreams. Music, in short, introduced me only to myself, and, since the processes of imagination and reminiscence, though pleasant, are not

particularly impressive or ennobling—I at least had the grace to realize that they were not—I came to the conclusion that the significance of music had been enormously over-rated. There were people, I knew, who dedicated their lives to the service of music; they were, I conceived, deluded. There were others who spoke as if the experience of listening to music was for them the most important that life offered; they were, I felt sure, *poseurs*. The talk about music, the criticism of music, the whole gossiping world of music—all this, I made so bold as to suggest, was a gigantic plant. I challenged my friends to prove to me that it was not. And of course they could not prove that it was not. All that they could do was to advise me to be patient, to put myself in the way of hearing music, as much of it, that is to say, as I could stand, and meanwhile to cultivate a little humility.

In due course my eyes, or rather my ears, were opened and listening to music has now become for me one of the most important—at times I am tempted to think the most important—experience that life holds. It is not merely that I enjoy it, deriving therefrom sensations of the most exquisite pleasantness; more to the point is that it brings with it precisely the conviction of being in contact with a reality other than and greater than myself of which Roger Fry speaks. When one is enjoying great music, the notion that one is *merely* experiencing a succession of sounds which happen to be productive of pleasant sensations seems as fantastic as the notion that beauty is merely the name with which one likes to dignify that which one happens to like. The materialist explanation, in other words, seems as fantastic as the subjectivist.

The point upon which I wish to insist is that the musical experience is not adequately described as merely a succession of feelings; it is also a kind of knowledge, and the knowledge that it conveys comes to one with the assurance of conviction. Nevertheless, it is knowledge that cannot be substantiated, demonstrated, or even communicated to those who do not share it. It enables us to say no word that will carry an ounce of conviction to those who, lacking the experience, are prepared to find the subjectivist or the materialist explanations of the experience plausible; for they *are* plausible, by far the most plausible of those in the field, for those who, not having enjoyed the experience of listening to first-rate music, have not perceived its significance.

All that one can say, as my friend said to me, is, experiment, listen continuously to music, be patient, see what happens, and meanwhile cultivate a little humility.

The moral is twofold. First, except to the few who are exceptionally gifted by nature, the highest kind of musical experience does not come naturally;<sup>1</sup> training, self-discipline, humility, and the willingness to put up with a certain amount of boredom, are for most of us the necessary pre-conditions of its enjoyment. 'Beauty', as the Greeks said, 'is hard.' I suspect that the same may be true of all the highest experiences that life has to offer. Only the simplest of pleasurable experiences are readily accessible to all. Even the pleasures of alcohol and tobacco are denied to the untrained taste. The first pipe turns the stomach, the first state of spirits or even of wine is found revolting.

*Good Taste not Natural but Acquired.*

The same conclusion holds true of the highest pleasures. Good taste, the taste, that is to say, that will enable us to distinguish the first from the second-rate in art and literature, and to insist on the first, is not natural but acquired. The untrained mind rejects Shakespeare's Sonnets, finds Bach Fugues boring and Cézanne's pictures meaningless. The method of training is frequent contact with beautiful, but initially unappreciated things. In course of time our eyes or ears are opened and we come in our degree and capacity to see the beauty that they embody; and the 'seeing' is not merely an activity of the senses but also of the spirit, and, being of the spirit, brings with it a kind of knowledge. It is knowledge in the sense that its content can be stated in the form of propositions which are true or false, as, for example, that this picture is beautiful; that the music of Johann Sebastian Bach is greater than that of his sons; that its significance derives from something that for want of a better term one calls 'reality', and that in making contact with it, one is looking through a window which, though it may obscure and distort, nevertheless opens upon 'reality'. But it is not *rational* knowledge, in the sense that it is not my *reason* that assures me of the truth of these propositions, and it is not demonstrable knowledge, so that it cannot

<sup>1</sup> Mr. J. D. M. Rorke's admirable book *A Musical Pilgrim's Progress* makes this point very effectively.

be communicated to those who lack the experience on which it is based. It is for this reason that it may justly be called intuitive in the sense of that term defined above.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, I do not see how, in the light of my experience of music and my appreciation of the significance of that experience, in the light too of my inability to communicate that significance, I can in common fairness deny that the mystics may really enjoy the experiences to which they testify, or that the experiences may possess the significance which the mystics claim for them. Yet I feel sure that had I been born stone deaf, or had I never been brought into contact with great music, I should have denied it.

(v) *That Feelings may be Untrustworthy.*

At this point it seems necessary to introduce a qualification. It is difficult to keep the scales of this discussion fairly balanced between the narrow dogmatism of the tougher materialist and the intellectual flabbiness of those idealists who in their anxiety to claim all for spirit, ignore the promptings of reason, turn a deaf ear to logic, and make light of the test of evidence. In the foregoing discussion I have an uncomfortable suspicion that I have unfairly tipped the scales in favour of the latter. Let me try to redress the balance.

I have said that there is intuitive knowledge and that this knowledge, being based on personal experience, is incommunicable, yet is absolutely convincing to the person who has it. Convincing to the person who has it, but not, therefore, necessarily true. The point is important. The sense of conviction is one thing, truth is another and many, perhaps most, of the propositions of whose truth human beings have felt most assuredly convinced have been subsequently shown to be false. This applies not only to propositions in regard to physical facts, as that the earth is flat and the sun goes round it, or that the light of the sun will grow dim unless the sun-god is intermittently fed with the sacrifice of living human beings; it applies also to so-called spiritual truths, as for example, that there is a heaven where souls wear white robes and play harps, or a hell where little children are tortured in slow fires.

The disparity between truth and conviction is nowhere more apparent than it is in relation to the kind of knowledge I have

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 244, 245.

been discussing, namely, intuitive knowledge based upon personal experience. Looking back over the melancholy history of human belief, one is sometimes tempted to think that the intensity with which beliefs have been held has been in inverse proportion to their truth.

*Beliefs Which are Determined by Psychological Conditions.*

Let me again illustrate by an example taken from my own experience. Some years ago I had a serious illness. It was the first illness that I had had since childhood, and coming to me when well on in middle age, it profoundly affected my attitude to life. When at last it departed, it left enduring traces behind. Among them was a certain condition which in time I came to recognize as a legacy of the illness. In its first onset this was predominantly a physiological condition. There were certain definite symptoms which marked it. These would persist for a few days and then pass away; but the symptoms were associated with a psychological mood which persisted after the symptoms had passed. It was a mood of profound depression. Usually, I enjoy my life as much as another; more, I have often thought, than many others. My normal state is cheerful; the things I do I think supremely well worth doing when I am doing them, and, as I am energetic, I do many things. When the condition supervened, the contrary was true. Nothing was looked forward to before it occurred; nothing seemed worth doing when the opportunity for doing it presented itself. Life appeared to be without point or purpose, which meant that there seemed to be no sufficient reason for effort or endeavour. One thing was as good or as bad as another. Moreover, I felt that things would never be different. Life, I was convinced, would always be like that.

Now the point I am anxious to stress is that this feeling, this conviction rather, that life would always seem pointless and I indifferent, persisted in the face of, and persisted simultaneously with the knowledge that both the feeling and the conviction were the by-products of a certain physiological condition that would pass. I knew the cause of the condition; it was induced, I was informed, by the release of poisons into my system from little pockets of infection which had failed to clear up. Moreover, I knew from past experience that it would pass in at most a couple

of days; I knew, then, that this conviction of mine, the conviction that life was a meaningless round of tedious tasks, was false; I knew at least that it was not my normal view of life, and that I should probably take a wholly different view of it to-morrow. Yet in no respect did my knowledge of these things modify the conviction, or the conviction of the permanence of the conviction.

When subsequently the conviction did begin to weaken, it was because the poisons released had become fewer or feebler. The presence of the still strong, though waning conviction side by side with the knowledge that it was the psychological by-product of an abnormal physiological condition, led to interesting complications—for example, that which ensued when for the first time the conviction arising from the physiological condition became weak enough to be shaken by the knowledge born of a reasonable mind—but these do not concern my argument, which is that a conviction born of intense feeling may be false without ceasing to be convincing, and that in certain exceptional cases, such as the one I have described, we can know that it is false without thereby being weakened in respect of the conviction. How does this illustration bear upon my general theme? It is intended to suggest that the assurance of the mystics' conviction is not in itself a guarantee of the existence of the reality of which they are convinced. The very fact that intuitive knowledge is not communicable makes it extremely difficult to test its truth, especially in cases such as that under discussion in which the obvious test of verification is not, at least in this life, available.

Again and again in the history of religion, prophets and prophetesses have arisen who have proclaimed with complete certainty the explanation of everything. The seventeenth century was particularly rich in these phenomena. In 1650, for example, Messrs. Reeve and Muggleton arose to declare that they were the chosen witnesses of the Lord, and that their appearance had been prophesied in the Book of Revelation, Chapter XI, verse 3. 'The truth', to quote from Lytton Strachey, 'was plain—it had been delivered to Muggleton by God; and henceforward until the Day of Judgement, the Deity would hold no further communication with His creatures. Prayer, therefore, was not only futile, it was blasphemous; and no form of worship was admissible, save the singing of a few hymns of thanksgiving and praise. All that was required of the true believer was that he should ponder upon

the Old and the New Testaments, and upon "The Third and Last Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ", by Muggleton.'

For these assertions Muggleton was imprisoned and on one occasion badly manhandled. Nevertheless, so great was the power of his conviction that he gathered round him a large and enthusiastic sect of whom 250 followed him to the grave. The Muggletonian faith, apparently, still continues. 'Still,' to quote Strachey, 'in the very spot where their founder was born, the chosen few meet together to celebrate the two festivals of their religion—the Great Holiday, on the anniversary of the delivery of the word to Reeve, and the Little Holiday, on the day of Muggleton's final release from prison.

"I do believe in God alone,  
Likewise in Reeve and Muggleton."

So they have sung for more than two hundred years.

"This is the Muggletonians' faith,  
This is the God which we believe;  
None salvation-knowledge hath,  
But those of Muggleton and Reeve;  
Christ is the Muggletonians' king,  
With whom eternally they'll sing."

Assurance and conviction are, it is obvious, not enough. Is there, then, no other test available? Is there, that is to say, no way of distinguishing intuitive convictions, which are or may be true, from those of the followers of Muggleton and Reeve which, I make so bold as to suggest, are almost certainly false? I think that there is.

(vi) *The Test of Effects.*

It is the test of effects. Are there, one may legitimately ask, any distinguishable and recognizable effects of the experience of reality, whether this takes the form of aesthetic enjoyment or of direct mystical experience (*a*) upon the person having the experience at the time when he has it, and (*b*) upon the person who habitually or intermittently has the experience, as regards his life and character as a whole? This is in effect what has come to be known as the behaviourist test. The only available method for discovering what is going on in a person's mind, what experiences he is undergoing and what are his thoughts and



emotions, is, say the behaviourists, that of seeing what he does. We have no direct insight into his mind, but we can observe his behaviour and from that we can, if we wish, deduce—although, say the behaviourists, the deduction is irrelevant to the *explanation* of his behaviour—what goes on in his mind. Therefore, if a man says that he has seen God, the only way to check his statement is to observe what effect his alleged vision has upon his actions, and then to draw our deductions.

The fact that I am now proposing to apply the behaviourist test does not mean that I am a behaviourist, either in the sense that I think this to be the only test, or in the sense that I believe we can have no *direct* knowledge of other people's minds and characters. On the contrary I believe that such knowledge is indeed possible.<sup>1</sup> I am merely acknowledging the obvious fact that the test is on occasion useful and may be used to supplement knowledge gained by other methods.

I propose, first, to consider the distinguishing characteristics of what I am provisionally assuming to be the experience of reality, as they are recognized in the actual experience itself. Assuming that there is a reality other than that of the familiar world, assuming that the human mind can make some contact with it in aesthetic, moral, and above all in religious and mystical experience, by what marks I am proposing to ask, can the fact that such contact has been made be recognized? This leads on to the further question—assuming that there exist men in whom the contact is habitual though intermittent, by what marks can we recognize such men?

Four such marks or features both in the experience and in the person having the experience may, I think, be distinguished, although in practice they frequently overlap.

*Some Characterizing Features of Aesthetic and (?) Religious Experience.*

(a) *Integration of Self.*

Many modern theories of psychology deny the unity of the self. Following Hume, they treat it as a bundle of impulses and desires which no continuing and embracing personality holds together. The self, on this view, is like a row of beads strung

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, the argument with regard to the nature of personality pp. 234, 235 above.

on *no* continuing thread. It is not necessary to subscribe to this extreme view—and I, for one, do not subscribe to it—to admit that much of our experience does in fact conform with humiliating accuracy to this description. It comes to us cut up into a series of desires, impulses, hopes, ideas, emotions, dreads, doubts, and so on. Sometimes these separate psychological events are not so much successive as simultaneous; occurring together they pull us in different directions. It is rarely, indeed, that we have no second thoughts, are free from the conflict of desire, and give our whole selves wholeheartedly to the thinking or doing of that on which we are at the moment engaged. It is the same with our actions. 'All action', says Aristotle, 'is upon a balance of considerations.' In extreme cases this continuous tug-of-war between the various elements of our nature becomes sufficiently acute to receive a label. The label is that of 'split personality'. In the case of split personality two different personalities seem alternately to animate the same body. But there is the milder case, known as 'temptation', when the desire to perform an action is opposed by the moral imperative which insists that we ought not to do what we desire to do. These are two examples, a more and a less extreme, of the fissures that cut across the surface of the self; in one case the self is split into two, and in the other, what is substantially the same self is pulled to and fro by the solicitations of the sectional selves that are embedded in it.

One of the outstanding characteristics of aesthetic experience is that, while it lasts, this to and fro conflict ceases. For so long as we are enjoying beauty, we are all of a piece, and, because all of a piece, at rest. This rest is not the rest of stalemate, as when two equally strong impulses to action set the scales of our personality in even balance, as we may suppose to have been the case with Buridan's rational ass who, finding itself midway between two equally large and equally succulent bundles of hay proceeded to starve, since, receiving no greater stimulus from the one than from the other, he could find no good reason for turning to the one rather than to the other. I doubt if the state of mind of the undecided ass could have been described as restful. The sensation of rest characteristic of aesthetic experience is due to the fact that our impulses, desires, thoughts, feelings, motives, actions, are temporarily integrated into a single whole; for once

we are wholly masters of ourselves, precisely because for once we are wholly ourselves. One way of putting this is to say that we are lost in the music, or absorbed in the drama, expressions intended to describe the fact that no part of us is left over to distract the whole from its absorbed contemplation, or even to obscure the fact that it is contemplating. To pass from the experience to the person, granted that the lover of beauty, whether in nature or in art, enjoys moments of serenity, it is not surprising that something of this intermittently enjoyed serenity should make itself apparent in his character. Compared with most of us he becomes an integrated person because he enjoys moments of integrated experience. One can recognize the integrated person. Whereas most of us are chameleons to our environment, he presents a single comparatively unvarying front to life; he does not lose his equanimity; he has perspective and knows what is important; less than most of us is he disturbed by the pimples and toothaches of experience. Again, he is at all times recognizably the same person; we think we know how he will behave in a great variety of circumstances, nor does he surprise us. We say of him that he has 'strength of character', meaning that he does not allow temporary and unrepresentative impulses to distract him from his business or deflect him from his purpose. Such are the more obvious characteristics of the integrated man.

*Some Characterizing Features of Aesthetic and (?) Religious Experience.*  
 (b) *Sense of Release.*

A well-known theory of psychology represents man as a stream of impulses and desires having their origin in what is called the unconscious. The best known version of this theory is to be found in Freud's account of the *libido*, conceived as a stream of psychic energy which, lying below the threshold of consciousness, expresses itself in the continuous succession of desirings and strivings, of likings and aversions, which constitute, for Freud, the essential texture of the individual's conscious life. Another and earlier version of this view is to be found in Schopenhauer's theory of an underlying Will, conceived as a restless ever-changing 'urge', which objectifies itself in living organisms. What these theories have in common is a view of human beings which represents them as essentially creatures of impulse and desire.

A man's desires are, on these theories, determined by a number of different influences, by his heredity, his environment, his training, his bodily constitution, influences which, between them, have made him what he is. A man so conceived is not free; his choices spring direct from his nature and his nature is the end product of the forces that have been brought to bear upon him. Man is thus represented as a creature driven this way and that, twitched now into love and now into war by invisible forces that pull the strings. And often, as I have pointed out, he is pulled different ways. Impulses drive him one way, while fear holds him back; desire pulls, but duty forbids; or there is a tug between conflicting desires.

I do not wish to subscribe to all the implications of this view of the human being as the puppet of his desires; I do not, indeed, think that it is wholly true. But it is obvious that there is much truth in it; obvious, that is to say, that much of our experience is in fact made up of needing and wanting, of craving and desiring; obvious, too, that only too often we are distracted by a conflict between desires. To put the point, as writers on creative evolution, for example Shaw, would put it, life having created us in furtherance of its evolutionary purpose will not allow us to idle when we should be going about its business. It will not let us be but is always urging us to new activities by the spur of fresh desires.

Now one of the characteristics of the experience which is the awareness of reality is precisely the sense of release which it brings from the constant interplay of impulse, which forms the texture of our daily life. For once, the strivings are stilled and the desires appeased; for once, we are at rest.

As instruments of evolution we are in our day-to-day existence mere channels through which flows restlessly and unceasingly the current of life. We are a surge of impulses, a battlefield of desires, over which we can only at length and after a lifetime of setback and of struggle obtain a degree of mastery through the achievement of self-discipline. Wishing, fearing, craving, hoping and willing, we may never, except in the rare moments of aesthetic enjoyment, be at rest. We must be for ever doing and stirring, improving and making better, meddling and changing. It is one of the paradoxes of our nature that we cannot even love a thing without seeking to change it, and by changing it to make it other than what we love. The greatest lovers of mankind have

been those who have spent their lives in the endeavour to save mankind; and since they have always insisted that mankind could not be saved except it repented, to save man was to alter him. A man cannot love the countryside without pruning and clipping, smartening and tidying, making meaningful and useful what has achieved beauty by accident, and imposing order upon the sweet disorder of nature. We cannot love a tree or even a stone, but sooner or later we must be pruning the tree or chipping a piece off the stone. We do these things because of the overmastering impulsion of our wills, yet were it not for our wills we should cease to be.

But this law, which is the law of life as evolving to an end, is not the law of life which has achieved the end. And so there is even now an exception to the law, in virtue of which we partake, if only for a moment, of the sense of rest and freedom which, we may conceive, will attend the realization by life of its goal. In the appreciation of music, of pictures and of Nature we get a momentary and fleeting glimpse of the nature of that reality to a full knowledge of which the movement of life is progressing. For that moment, and for so long as the glimpse persists, we realize in anticipation and almost, as it were, illicitly the nature of the end. We are, if I may so put it, for the moment *there*, just as a traveller may obtain a fleeting glimpse of a distant country from a height passed on the way, and cease for a space from his journey to enjoy the view. And since we are for the moment *there*, we experience while the moment lasts that sense of liberation from the drive of life, which has been noted as one of the special characteristics of aesthetic experience. We who are part and parcel of the evolutionary stream stand for the time outside and above the stream, and are permitted for a moment to be withdrawn from the thrust and play of impulse and desire, which are our natural attributes as evolutionary tools. For so long as we enjoy our vision of the end, life lets us alone. We feel neither need nor want, and, losing ourselves in contemplation of the reality beyond us, we become for the moment selfless.

*Some Characterizing Features of Aesthetic and (?) Religious Experience.*  
(c) 'Continuity' of Experience.

Continuity is a bad name for the characteristic whose nature I wish to convey, yet I cannot think of a better. The word is

intended to denote that feature of aesthetic experiences which we have in mind when we say that they 'grow on one'. They grow in several ways. As we develop the aesthetic side of our natures, the desire for the experience grows, the capacity for it grows, the experience when enjoyed is enjoyed more, and the scope and range of the experiences which are found aesthetically enjoyable are widened.

Let me illustrate again from my own experience in music. When I was twenty, I had, as I have already explained, no knowledge of music, and the musical experience played very little part in my life. At thirty I was a worshipper of Beethoven, derived an enormous excitement from listening to his works, but did not think of them when not actually listening to them, and could go happily for weeks at a time without hearing them. At fifty, if I am for more than a few days without music, I become sensible of a definite lack. My head buzzes with remembered themes like a hive of bees; I sing in the bath; I make a nuisance of myself by whistling untunefully about the house; I put myself out in every conceivable way to hear a gramophone, however bad. Not owning a radio set, I seek out company to which I am normally indifferent in the hope of hearing music on the wireless. As the need grows greater, so does the capacity for satisfying it. At thirty I could not keep my attention concentrated on music for more than half an hour at a time. All concerts, I used to complain, were too long—I still think that they are too long—and operas much too long. Now I can focus a concentrated attention upon music for an hour at a time and, so far at least as Mozart's operas are concerned, I am unashamedly sorry when they are over.<sup>1</sup> But though my musical experiences are more enjoyed, I doubt if they are more intense. When I first came to music it produced in me not only a violent psychological, but even a physical effect. I was excited and exhilarated, but also, alas, I was restless and fidgety. I could not keep still; I rapped with my fingers, beat time with my hands, jiggled in my seat. At extreme moments goose-flesh ran in delicious tremors all the way up my spine. I remember that the first time I heard the Kreutzer sonata I was so affected that tears gathered in my eyes and ran down my cheeks; I was unable to sit still. Finally I

<sup>1</sup> Wagner's operas still seem insupportably long; they always did.

made such a nuisance of myself that to avoid being lynched by my outraged neighbours I had to get up and go out. Now my enjoyment of music is calmer and, perhaps, because calmer, more fully aware. There is no rush of agitated feeling to blur the musical palate or disturb the conscious keenness with which I savour my sensations. More important, perhaps, there is no aftermath of anti-climax. It is as if more of my personality were gathered up into the act of appreciating, making of it a fuller and, if I may venture upon so presumptuous an expression, a more spiritual thing. And, since more of my personality is gathered up, no part of me remains outside the experience bored and indifferent, and preparing to punish me for my absorption by the reaction of anti-climax when it is over. Finally, I now enjoy a wider range of music than before. When my ears were first opened to the beauty which belongs to patterns of sound, they were for a time open only to a very limited number of patterns. Beethoven was the centre of my musical universe. Round him rotated as satellites of the inner ring Mozart and Bach; circling in an outer orbit there were Haydn, Handel and, presently, Schubert; but beyond the confines lit up by these luminaries, there was musical darkness. Now my taste has widened and I can find delight over a reasonably large area of the available field.

By 'continuity', then, I mean the tendency of the experience of beauty to 'grow on one', to grow in the sense of becoming wider in scope, deeper and more satisfying in enjoyment, and longer in duration; of spreading in fact over a larger area of one's conscious horizon.

*'Continuity' in the Experience of Goodness.*

Of the experience of goodness I hesitate to speak; mine has been so slight; but here, too, I think I can detect the same power of increase. When I first escaped from the swaddling clothes of parental authority and unthinkingly-accepted religion, I entered upon an a-moral period. As I have noted above, I proceeded to enjoy myself, uninhibited by moral scruples. Broadly speaking, there was for me no distinction between the good I ought to do and between the pleasant that I wanted to do. If I wanted it, it was, for me, the good.

In a word, I did what I liked and I had no qualms about it.

Morals I dismissed as a rationalization of the impulse to blame. My approach to others was no more ethical than my attitude to myself. I was interested, I explained, in people's minds not in their characters, in what they thought rather than in what they did. I did not, I used to affirm, care very much whether a man was good or bad, but I did care very much whether he was stupid and dull or intelligent and amusing. I took pleasure in announcing that I did not mind what a man's morals were so long as he was lively, witty and informed. The coming of war and the recognition of the incorrigibility of evil in the world have, as I have tried to explain, cured me of 'all that'. I now try intermittently, no doubt, and within strictly defined limits, to be a better man; I am also more percipient of goodness in others. I can, I like to think, recognize a good man when I see him and I value him for the goodness in him which I recognize. There are men, not many of them, in regard to whom the questions 'Are they intelligent?' or 'Are they amusing?' do not arise. One recognizes them for what they are, better men than oneself and possessed of a value which is other than the values of wit, charm or intelligence. In the faces of such men goodness shines as beauty shines forth from a picture—for goodness, I have come to think, is to the spirit as beauty is to matter; goodness is, indeed, the beauty of the spirit. . . . But even in ordinary fallible men and women not much better than myself, I can now see the goodness which previously passed unnoticed. In other words, my capacity for appreciating and detecting moral worth grows with experience, grows, I had almost said, with what it feeds on. Almost, but not quite, for here an important distinction must be made.

*Note on the Distinction between the Features of Aesthetic and Moral Experience and those of Appetite and Desire.*

That appetite 'grows with what it feeds on' is a truth with which we are all too distressingly familiar. It applies to the bodily appetites, from the appetite for sexual pleasure to the appetite for drink, from the appetite for speed to the appetite for drugs. It applies no less to the psychological appetites, to vanity and pride and avarice and ambition; it applies most of all to the love of inflicting pain. To the truth that cruelty grows with the perpetration of cruel acts, the history of our times, with its



steady increase both in unpremeditated and in calculated cruelty in the shape of deliberate torture, bears its lamentable witness. It has been urged with justice against vivisection that there have been men who began experiments on the bodies of living animals from the disinterested motives of increasing knowledge, of alleviating pain or of curing disease, yet have continued from the attraction which the infliction of suffering began unconsciously to exercise upon them. They may have been unaware, they usually were unaware, that the experiments once undertaken from creditable, were continued from discreditable motives. The love of power has been in our time the guiding motive of great numbers of men, and from the very fact that it is power that they seek and obtain, of men who are in a position to sway the destinies of their fellows. The effects of power upon human character are well-known, and there is no need to dilate upon them here; but not the least distressing of them is the fact that the power-holder comes so to enjoy the exercise of his power that he will take any course however ruthless to maintain it, nor will he scruple to inflict untold miseries upon millions of his fellow men if he believes it to be threatened.

Since all human appetites possess the characteristic of increasing *pari passu* with their satisfaction, how, it may be asked, are they to be distinguished from those experiences which I am suggesting are to be interpreted as the spirit's apprehension of reality? I suggest that there are three distinctions.

(1) First, in the case of the appetites there is an experience of craving so long as the appetite is not satisfied. The experience grows until the appetite becomes what Plato calls a tyrant, dominating the individual's horizon and spurring him to action until it has achieved its satisfaction. The drug addict embodies this characteristic in an extreme form. Deprived of his opium, his personality contracts into a single obsessive craving for the thing that will allay its need. For craving is disagreeable and, as Schopenhauer pointed out, because it is disagreeable, will not let us rest until we have allayed it. Ambition and cruelty exhibit this same characteristic in a less extreme form. But we are not made miserable by a craving for pictures when we are not looking at them, by a longing for a spring morning in winter

or for a beautiful sunset on a dull day, or by the contemplation of the goodness in others which we lack in ourselves.

(2) Secondly, an appetite satisfied brings temporary satiety, a satiety which may be experienced as disgusting. Shakespeare's sonnet on the effects of 'lust in action' stands as a classic exposition of this characteristic. Even in less extreme cases, satisfied appetite involves a temporary reaction—which is only sometimes disagreeable—in which all desire for the experience by which the craving has been satisfied disappears until, of course, the craving renews itself. Thus the personality swings between the two poles of craving and satiety, of desiring a thing and not desiring it. These fluctuations make against integration and reduce the personality to a succession of different states and desires.

(3) Thirdly, the satisfaction of the appetites is on the whole subject to the law of diminishing returns. Broadly it is true that, the more continuously indulged the craving, the smaller the satisfaction it brings. The experienced and professional sensualist gets less satisfaction from the indulgence of his sensual appetites than the untried young lover, the chain smoker from his endlessly successive cigarettes than the man who confines himself to four or five pipes a day, the drunkard than the man who drinks a couple of glasses of wine with his dinner. That this is so is testified by the wisdom of all the moralists, from Aristotle's teaching on moderation embodied in the doctrine of the Mean, to Blake's famous quatrain:

*He who bends to himself a Joy  
Doth the winged life destroy ;  
But he who kisseth the Joy as it flies  
Lives in Eternity's sunrise.*

In other words, the man who would get the greatest satisfaction from his desires, will do well to study the right occasions of satisfying them and the right degree of satisfaction. Also—though this is a separate point which belongs to the criticism of Hedonism<sup>1</sup>—he will be well advised not to make their satisfaction the direct motive of his actions.

These considerations combine to suggest that the life of desire

<sup>1</sup> Hedonism (Psychological) is the doctrine that the desire to obtain pleasure for the self is the sole motive of all our actions.

is a disappointing and a tiring life, since not only do desires continuously indulged grow stronger, but the satisfaction of desires continuously indulged grows weaker.

Once again, the contrast with those experiences which spring from the mind's awareness of and response to reality is apparent. Not only does the taste for music grow, its returns in terms of satisfaction also grow. The man whose life is devoted to the cultivation of his aesthetic sensibilities sees more interest in the world, more beauty, more scope for his sympathy and appreciation, as the years pass. The growing subtlety and depth of the aesthetic sense is, indeed, one of the greatest compensations of middle age for the waning of the pleasures of youth.

### *The Life of the Good Man*

Again I hesitate to speak of the pleasures of the good man. It is, however, an observable fact that those who have seriously studied to make themselves better derive increasing satisfaction from the pursuit of virtue. It seems impossible to them that they should go back to the old life of taking their pleasures as they found them and devoting all their ingenuity to the satisfaction of their appetites. Here the Christian doctrine of temptation seems to me to be wholly in accordance with the facts of experience. The first time it is fought, the temptation seems almost inconceivably strong. Each successive victory diminishes its strength at the next onset until finally it disappears from our consciousness—only, however, since evil is ineradicable in the human heart, to be succeeded by another, demanding of us fresh efforts leading to fresh victories or defeats.

The good man is one in whom virtue has become, in Aristotle's phrase, 'a settled habit'. He does what is right instinctively and unthinkingly so that his energies are not wasted, his attention not distracted by continual conflict against continual temptation. Thus the habit and practice of goodness are infinitely extensible, growing no doubt with what they feed on, but growing not as the passions grow, which consume what is offered to them and blunt appetite in the process of consuming, but as grows the curiosity of the explorer, whether of the mind or the planet, who, finding ever fresh realms to conquer, pursues his conquests with ever increasing gusto. In these three respects, in respect of the absence of craving, in respect of the absence of satiety, and in

respect of the absence of diminishing returns, the experience of beauty and of goodness, an experience whose significance, I am suggesting, is other-worldly, may be differentiated from the satisfaction of the desires and the appetites which are wholly of this world.

*Some Characterizing Features of Aesthetic and (?) Religious Experience. (d) Conviction of Reality.*

The fourth characteristic of aesthetic, moral and, I should like to add, religious experience of which something may be said is conviction of reality. The person enjoying beauty in art or nature enjoys also the conviction that he is making contact with a reality other than and greater than himself. To one who has enjoyed the highest type of musical experience the suggestion that the beauty that thrills him is subjective, that it is, in other words, only the name that he gives to what happens to arouse pleasant sensations in him, and is, therefore, the projection of his own imagination upon what is in reality nothing but a set of physical events produced by drawing the tail of a dead horse across the entrails of a dead cat—such a suggestion, I say, appears hopelessly unplausible. The strength of the conviction that it is unplausible, though the conviction does not rank as an argument, constitutes in my view a stronger consideration against the subjective view than any of the *arguable* considerations that I have submitted. Falling, however, as it does, within the category of intuitive knowledge as defined above, it carries no weight with those who have not felt it. I can only repeat that nothing will convince the person enjoying the experience of beauty that the pleasure he feels is from the point of view of its interpretation on a par with the feelings which he derives from the satisfaction of his bodily appetites, although in the gourmet's appreciation of wine and food the satisfaction of the appetites may sometimes approach it. A man satisfies his appetites, and that is all the account that needs to be given of his experience, for that is all that the experience is; the animals do no less. But in contact with reality—assuming always that this is the correct interpretation of the experience I am describing—you feel that you do, for so long as the experience lasts, stand upon the threshold of a different world, and are changed by virtue of your so standing. This assurance of the uniqueness of the experience is no less real than the conviction

of the reality to which the experience points, yet neither can be conveyed to those who have not shared it. Two things only can be said in words. First, there is knowledge, the knowledge that the order of reality of which a fleeting glimpse has been vouchsafed, is higher than the familiar order. I can here only define 'higher' subjectively in terms of the nature of the feeling which contact with the reality, however transitory and incomplete, evokes. For the experience brings with it a feeling of awe and reverence, even of love.

Secondly, there is the feeling—and here I am speaking only of the rarest moments of musical experience—that this something of which so transitory a glimpse has been caught is not after all wholly other than the self. I have said above that it is other, and the contradiction is at first sight direct. But how if there be not one self but two, the everyday self which is the source of appetite and desire, which is brought by the senses into contact with the external world, which thinks and hopes and feels, and an inner self which assumes the control of consciousness only in certain comparatively rare moments of experience.

### *The Doctrine of the Two Selves.*

The doctrine of the two selves has a long and complicated history both in philosophy and theology. The religions of India, both Hindu and Buddhist, accept it as fundamental. The Christian doctrine of the immortality of the soul entails it, albeit in a less extreme form. Kant's theory of morality is based upon it. Into so vast a subject I cannot enter here. I mention the distinction only because, if it is valid, it enables me to make good my assertion that the reality glimpsed in aesthetic and religious experience is both other and not other, and so to rescue myself from the appearance of contradiction. The reality is other than the everyday self, not other than the inner self. Indeed, one may go further and add that, while a characteristic of the knowledge obtained by the everyday self is the otherness of the self from its object—thus when I know the table I do not become the table, when I think about squareness or redness my thinking is not itself square or red, and so on—the knowledge of the inner self may be characterized by precisely that identification of the knower with its object which Bergson affirms to be the distinguishing mark of intuition. I said above 'if it is valid', since I do not wish to affirm

positively that it is valid; still less to commit myself to all the consequences which the distinction between the two selves carries with it in Hindu religion and Kantian philosophy. The distinction does, however, serve a useful purpose in the present connection, since it enables us to give an intelligible account of what appears to be an undeniable feature of the higher types of aesthetic experience, namely, that in them the experiencer is carried over into, and temporarily merged with the object which he apprehends. In mystical experience this conviction of oneness between the mystic and the Being whom he worships is emphatically and continuously affirmed. According to the mystics of the West, the soul is taken up into and becomes one with the personal God; among the mystics of the East the relation postulated is rather that of union between a universal consciousness which is or is expressed in our inner selves and the inner selves which are expressions of it. Thus to know reality is, for the Eastern mystic, to become one with or to realize the true inner self; to realize the inner self is to become one with reality. But all mystics insist that the kind of 'knowing' which characterizes the mystical experience is not like the familiar act of knowing in which the self stands outside the object known; it is an act of union between two entities, the self and reality which, normally distinguished as two, are here brought together into the unity of a 'one'.

The point I am trying to make is that in the aesthetic experience this conviction of unity is, albeit obscurely, foreshadowed, and that, in the light of it, those who have enjoyed the full content of the experience of great art may permit themselves to believe that the mystics are not, as they might otherwise have been tempted to suppose, talking nonsense.

*Summary of the Foregoing Argument.*

(1) I have suggested that integration, sense of release, continuity and conviction of reality are distinguishing features of aesthetic experience.

(2) I have ventured to infer that they may be even more markedly the characteristics of religious and mystical experience.

(3) I infer further that those to whom aesthetic, moral and mystical experiences are more or less continuously vouchsafed, by whom, in other words, what is good, what is true, what is

beautiful and above all, what is sacred, are more or less continuously known, will be found to exhibit these characteristics in their personalities. The tree is known by its fruits, and such as you more or less continuously are and feel, so do you become.

(4) If, then, there is to be found in the world a distinguishable type of man, recognizable by virtue of the fact that his personality is characterized by the traits that these experiences have formed, then, I should say, the fact that there are such men suggests that they have frequently enjoyed such experiences, and that their characters are what they are because they reflect the nature of the experiences which have built them up, as the avarice of the miser becomes stamped upon his features. I should add that the tendency of these experiences so to stamp themselves upon the character is evidence for the metaphysical interpretation of their nature and significance for which I have been arguing.

(vii) *The Religious Teachers.*

Is there, then, such a recognizable class of men? I think that there is, and that the accounts of them form a distinguishable, continuing thread running through the record of the ages. Take, for example, such a man as Socrates. Preaching continuously against the tyranny of the passions, he is himself immune. He drinks, but in moderation; he can stand hardship and fatigue. In a famous passage in the *Symposium* we are told how, when sexual temptation was offered to him in its most seductive form, he resisted it. He is himself and wholly in control of himself. He is, again, a man released; released, that is to say, from the solicitation of the desires and ambitions of this world. He cares nothing for the goods that appeal to most of us; for wealth, for fame, for comfort and popularity. Continuously he exhibits that non-attachment to earthly things which comes to most of us only in rare moments of aesthetic and perhaps moral experience. With the energy made available by his persistent refusal to dissipate his faculties in trivial pursuits or on behalf of unworthy ends, he pursues the good life and seeks the knowledge of reality. And with some measure of success. At first intermittently and then, as he grows older, more continuously, he pursues goodness and enjoys beauty—witness, for example, in this connection the account of the revelation of the Form of beauty in Plato's *Symposium*. More-

over, his experiences are intuitive and, therefore, incommunicable. He ascribes them to an inner voice, a voice whose accents are not those of reason, but which is not, therefore, lower than reason; rather, it is beyond reason. Finally, he has himself no doubt as to the existence of the reality behind the world of appearance which his contemplative vision reveals to him.

As it is with Socrates, so in their nature and degree is it with all the great religious teachers and the lovers of good lives, with Buddha and Confucius, with Lao Tse and Saint Francis and Father Damien, with the mystics, above all with Christ Himself. I have neither the knowledge nor the ability to make good this claim by a detailed examination of their lives, but such acquaintance with them as I possess strongly suggests that precisely the traits I have mentioned were exhibited by all of them. All were convinced of the existence of a reality behind the familiar world, all established frequent and growing contact with this reality, all as a result became non-attached to the desires and passions of this world. What is true in a greater degree of these outstanding personalities is true in a lesser degree of other men and women. It is true even of some of those whom we meet in our daily lives. With surprising unanimity, in every age and in every civilization, men have recognized the good man. Moreover, in spite of differences of moral code and habit, they have been in agreement as to the traits wherein his goodness consisted; agreed that he was not power-loving, not wealth-loving, not self-advancing, not self-centred; agreed above all that he was other-worldly. One recognizes a good man in fact precisely by the degree of his non-attachment to the things of this world, a non-attachment which must be qualified by the rider that it is achieved only because of an attachment to the things of another world. By their fruits, I repeat, we know them. In the last resort, the strongest argument for the existence of a reality other than that of the familiar world, a reality which is in some sense the true home of man's spirit, to which perhaps he once belonged more completely, from which he should never have been parted and to which he may hope one day to return—the strongest argument, I say, for such a reality, the assertion of which I take to be common to and distinctive of all religious views of the universe, is the testimony of the lives and characters of the thousands who have believed in it and have lived in accordance with their beliefs.



## Chapter 8

# THE CHRISTIAN<sup>1</sup> CLAIM

I have been in doubt as to whether to add this chapter. There are three grounds for the doubt. First, I am not certain how far an examination of the Christian claim is germane to the thesis of this book. Secondly, I am certain of the insufficiency of my pretensions to examine it. Thirdly, I suspect that my examination will antagonize many otherwise friendly critics and, bringing me many kicks, will bring me no ha'pence. The decision to include it means that my doubts and hesitations have been overcome. Let me take them one by one.

### *Recapitulation.*

Consideration of the first ground for hesitation enables me to indulge in a fresh stock-taking, which is much overdue. What roughly has been the course of this book, and to what point has it brought me? First, there is a list of negative conclusions. I have been unable to accept the arguments for the view that this world is the creation of an omnipotent, benevolent, personal God, and I have been unable to find any convincing reply to the arguments showing that it cannot have been so created. I stress the word 'arguments', for in this sphere, as I have several times maintained, argument has not necessarily the last word, and it may be that this world is in fact the creation of such a God, although on examination the view that it is may turn out to be repugnant to the intellect.

On the other hand, I have not been able to accept the conclusions either that matter is the only form of existence, mechanical law the only type of law, the empirical the only test of evidence,

<sup>1</sup> By the word 'Christianity' as used in this chapter, I wish to denote what is and has been commonly understood by the word by most of the people who have at any time used it. I do not mean the highest common factor of Christian doctrine, whatever this may be, or some core of doctrine which I personally take to be essential.

or the scientific the only method of discovering truth. Further, I have been unable to accept those views of the universe which, postulating mind as a real and independent form of existence, making provision for teleological as well as for mechanical causation, and doing justice to the facts of novelty and development in the universe, nevertheless maintain that there are no levels of reality other than and beyond that of the familiar world of nature including living bodies and minds and their thoughts which evolve in time, and contend, therefore, that if there is Deity in the universe, the divine must be a further instalment of the same process of developing life as has produced ourselves; if value, that it must be such as our minds have created.

This brings me to the positive part of what I have sought to maintain. There is a world of values, real and eternal, which is other than and outside the world of evolving life. (This entails the rejection both of materialism and of subjectivism.) Of this world we may achieve knowledge which is intuitive in character and cannot be demonstrated by argument or communicated to those who have not shared the experience on which it is based. The view that the values are the expressions of an underlying unity has seemed to me to possess considerable antecedent plausibility, and, if such a unity be granted, it has seemed reasonable to suppose that it is that of a person, a person with whom human beings can make contact in religious and mystical experience, and with aspects or expressions of whose nature they do make contact in moral and aesthetic experience. I am accepting, then, the view that what the great religions have taught about the real nature of the universe in which we live is in substance true; at least it seems to me to be more likely to be true than any alternative account.

All these avowals, it will be seen, are tentative and hesitant. I talk of probability and plausibility; I am only just on the affirmative side of agnosticism. Moreover, a position which entertains with sympathy as a reasonable supposition, though it does not positively identify itself with, the hypothesis that the world was created by a *person*, is not far removed from positions which do make this assertion and would seem, therefore, to be inconsistent with the negative conclusions reached in the first chapters of this book. I admit the apparent inconsistency, but I do not

see how to help it.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, I do not see that it is possible to be other than tentative and provisional in treating of these high and difficult themes. What justification can a man have for asserting rather than for suggesting, for laying down laws rather than entertaining hypotheses, for saying in fact that he *knows*, where the subject matter with which he is dealing is the nature of the universe as a whole and the data which he is required to take into account are as various, and at times apparently as contradictory, as those which the universe affords. Our species is young, our minds limited, and the truth is not known to them. Humility alone suggests an attitude of caution, while the results which in the past have attended the endeavour to supply the place of knowledge by converting conjectures into dogmas, are as unfortunate as they are familiar.

*The Character of the Christian Conviction.*

Having reached this point in my tentative rejections and provisional acceptances, I find myself brought to a sudden halt. For at this point I find myself confronted with a doctrine which is not hesitant but definite, not provisional, but positive, which makes assertions about history and metaphysics, assertions of a dogmatic type in which millions of men and women have passionately believed, which happens, moreover, to be the religion of the civilization into which I have been born, and which, if its claim could be accepted, would convict the speculations and arguments contained in the preceding chapters of being as superfluous in the light of its assured conviction as they are coldly grudging in comparison with its enthusiastic acceptance—as though a man were to light a torch to see the sunrise.

It seems to me, then, that an examination of this, the Christian claim is, indeed, germane to the argument of this book.

The two other grounds for hesitation can be more quickly disposed of.

*The Author's Lack of Qualifications.*

That I lack qualifications is true, but qualifications for what? For a research into the historical evidence for the truth of Chris-

<sup>1</sup> See, however, pp. 286, 287 above for a suggestion as to how the apparent inconsistency might be overcome.

tianity. This evidence turns in general upon the authenticity of the Gospel narratives, and in particular upon the accounts of the Resurrection. For an investigation of such matters I have neither the energy, the learning nor the ability. But it is not with such matters that I am concerned. The claim of the Christian doctrine to be revealed religious truth is based no doubt in part upon historical considerations, but only in part. It is also backed by metaphysical arguments and supported by empirical evidence. Upon the metaphysical arguments a professional philosopher has the right to comment; upon the empirical evidence the common man has a right to pass judgement, for the empirical evidence embraces such matters as the effects of the acceptance of Christianity upon the conduct of human beings in the past, the place of Christian belief in men's lives in the present, the records and the prospects of the Christian Churches, and the claim of the believer to make contact with God and to improve his character through the medium of prayer. The empirical evidence turns, in short, on the questions how far has Christianity helped, how far *does* Christianity help those who accept it to live better lives? We are all of us entitled to try to answer this question, for we all of us have access to the evidence on which an answer could be based. It is, indeed, one of the special and distinctive assertions of Christianity that Christ came into the world to help the poor man, to enlighten the uninstructed man, to assist the sinful man, to appeal, in fact, to the common man all the world over. The Gospel story, for example, has been presented not as a work of high scholarship to be understood only by men of high learning, but as revealed religious truth to be simply accepted by the multitude. Jesus Himself bids us open our hearts and empty our minds before we come to Him. The view that Christianity is an esoteric religion whose appeal is only to the initiated is, indeed, wholly contrary to the spirit of Christianity, as it is presented to us in this country. The claim is, on the contrary, that Christianity is for all men, the lettered as well as the unlettered, the unlettered as well as the lettered. Very good, let the claim be conceded: but, if it is conceded, the concession carries with it the right of all men freely to examine and, if they be so minded, to reject the pretensions of the claimant.

*Author's Liability to Incur Criticism and Arouse Prejudice.*

Thirdly, there is the question of prejudice, the prejudice, that is to say, which may be aroused against the author and militate against the favourable reception of his book. It has fallen to my lot to have been regarded for many years as an enemy of religion. 'God, the Devil and Mr. Joad' is the advertised title of a sermon to be preached in Liverpool in the week in which these paragraphs have been written. And it is, indeed, the case that I have been numbered among the band of critics who, during the last twenty years, have been saddled with the responsibility of sapping the faith of the young; numbered with such regularity, that the names of Aldous Huxley, H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell and, I am afraid, C. E. M. Joad, those arch foes of religion, have come to sound like an incantation which the priest murmurs as with bell, book and candle he adjures the people to turn their backs on the dark river of thought and return to the lighted way of simple faith.

It will, I hope, be clear from the foregoing pages that any hostility that I may once have felt to religion has long since evaporated and been replaced by a wistful agnosticism. I would like to believe, even if I cannot. The heart demands, even if the reason still denies. This being so, the admonition that I may incur the disapproval of the orthodox loses much of its force. Why should I be frightened of provoking those who have never been my friends?

But suppose that they are just about to become my friends? Is it not, in that case, unwise to rebuff them? Suppose that they are willing to come halfway to meet me, as I in this book have gone more than halfway to meet them? Is it not a pity to turn them back and in so doing, perhaps, to turn back myself? Yet what other effect can a critical treatment of organized Christian belief have than to induce in both parties a breaking off of negotiations followed by a right-about-turn?

I am sorry if this should be the result, but I cannot help it. I, too, have my prides and vanities, and one of them is to follow reason wherever it leads, to proclaim the truth that I see and—at the moment even more important—not to proclaim the truth that I do not see. I should be proving false to my own creed if I chose the soft option and sought to ensure a good reception for

the returned prodigal—for it is in this role that throughout the major part of this book I cannot help but see myself—by omitting a chapter which is plainly critical of some Christian claims.

*The Challenge of Mr. Hollis.*

Finally, I have a challenge to meet. Many times in recent years those within the fold have reasoned with me and with others like me somewhat as follows. 'You are not a materialist. You admit the independence and efficacy of spirit; you also assert the objectivity of values; you think it probable that the universe has meaning and purpose. Why, then, not go all the way? Why continue to plough a lonely furrow, shot at from both sides, a target for all comers, when you might come over to us and find rest and protection within the Church? Why, above all, having gone so far, don't you take the trouble to inform yourself more closely as to the doctrines of the religion which claims to have discovered the truths whose acceptance is the logical end of your own pilgrimage, but from which you still shy like a frightened mule?' I am both provoked and flattered by this challenge, especially when it is made in the persuasive accents of Mr. Christopher Hollis, as, for example, in the following extract from a recent review in the Catholic journal *The Tablet*. I had been arguing that democracy is the only political system which is compatible with Christianity, since it is the only political system which is prepared to treat the individual as an end in himself and not merely as a means to the ends of the State. In his review Mr. Hollis comments as follows:

'Now it is all very well', he writes, 'for Mr. Joad to tell the Government that it ought to treat everybody as if they possessed an immortal soul, whether they do or not. But what does Mr. Joad answer if the Government—that is to say, the governor—asks why he should? Mr. Joad replies with an eloquent lecture on the aesthetic beauty of morals and freedom. I am far from denying that beauty, and far from being moved by Mr. Joad's eloquence. But in the last resort, his whole case, as he puts it, is really only a hedonistic and sentimental one. Governments should behave in that sort of way, because Mr. Joad likes that sort of thing.'

This is not, by the way, a fair statement of the implications of

my position. If, as I do, you believe in the objectivity of moral and aesthetic values, to say that governments *ought* not to behave in a certain sort of way does not mean merely that you personally dislike and disapprove of such behaviour; to admit that that was all that it *did* mean, would be to subscribe to the tenets of subjectivism, against which I have argued at length.

Mr. Hollis continues:

'We are frequently told that the only thing the Nazis fear is force. Yet the application of force—our military force—to them is obviously attended with enormous difficulties. What a thousand pities it is that they are not afraid of hell! And why is it that they are not afraid of hell? I fear that there is no doubt that the reason is because Liberal professors, through the generations, have steadily sapped and undermined the world's faith in hell. They are horrified at the consequence of their activities. They hate that consequence. They had intended that liberated man, emancipated from his false faiths, should settle down to a life of quiet and scholarly agnosticism, but it is not everybody whose taste runs to quiet and scholarly agnosticism. On the whole, human nature being what it is, more people get fun out of sadism than out of scholarship, and a world in which the sense of responsibility to a Creator has been banished will be a world in which horrors will in fact run riot, however eloquently the scholars may preach in denunciation of them.'

In other words, man without God to help him, thrown helpless on the slender resources of his own moral integrity, will behave like a beast. Possibly, possibly not. I am not at the moment concerned to argue this point with Mr. Hollis, for I am anxious to come to his challenge and his claim.

'That being so,' he continues, 'surely the task for the scholar is not to clothe his own moral preferences in beautiful language, but to address himself to the all-important historical problem of what is true and what did really happen. For there was history. Something happened one way or the other, at the time when the Christian religion came to birth. What was it? Philosophers since the beginning of time have sought to discover purely metaphysical proofs of the immortality of the soul. It may well be argued that they have failed, and that the only honest course, if one were dependent solely on the metaphysical arguments, would be to

reserve judgement. At the very most, it might be said, all that the arguments show is that the soul survives death, or that there is no evidence of its death, but they do not show that it is immortal. But, if that be so, it becomes surely the more important to address oneself to the historical argument. For here was One who claimed to speak with authority on this and on other all-important questions. He founded an institution which these eminent professors have now come to speak of with considerable respect. They find that under its teaching a deeper spiritual life was offered to man than he had ever known before. They are well aware that if it perishes, mankind will be faced with almost disastrous regression. Why is all this? Was it just a kind of accident that the Christian Church happened to come along at a moment in history when for reasons of secular evolution the world was in any event ready for new great steps forward? Or was it because this was indeed a new and unique thing and its claims were true? I do not want to rush anybody into a decision or to refuse respect to honest searchers after truth, who are conscientiously unable to give the answer of acceptance. But I am a little puzzled at the growing number of persons of integrity who are able to travel so far, and who then seem to lose curiosity when they have got to the very threshold of what is claimed to be truth, and what is, in any event, the crowning point necessary to give force and final coherence to their own teaching. What is puzzling is not that they do not accept the Resurrection, but that they do not seem to be interested in it.'

This, then, is the claim, that a series of unique events happened when Christ was born into the world and subsequently raised from the dead, and that because of the uniqueness of these events the attitude of every human being to the subjects discussed in this book must be different from what it would have been, had they not occurred. And with the claim comes the challenge, the challenge addressed to those of us who, having 'travelled so far', not only do not accept, but are apparently not even interested in the uniqueness of these events. Why, we are asked, do we not accept? Why do we even seem uninterested? And ought we not to be ashamed of ourselves because we do not accept and because we are not interested?

I am moved by this challenge and I want to take it up.



## THE CHRISTIAN CLAIM. (1) THE CLAIM IN RESPECT OF CHRIST'S UNIQUE STATUS IN THE UNIVERSE.

There are two aspects of this Christian claim which I and others like me are rebuked for our failure to accept, which I wish to discuss. The first is that the Birth, the Resurrection and the Ascension of Christ are unique facts in the history of the world, unique in the sense that because they occurred, nothing that has happened afterwards can be quite the same as it would have been if they had not occurred.

I propose to draw for a statement of this claim upon Mr. Lewis's book *The Problem of Pain* to which I shall refer from time to time in the course of the ensuing exposition, as a widely accepted and justly praised contemporary statement of Christian doctrine.

### *A Digression on Authorities.*

And here, I see, I am committed to a short digression on Christian authorities, or, more precisely, on the authorities for Christian doctrine. Agnostics and anti-Christians are frequently charged with taking the Christian creed from the mouths of its less well-equipped exponents. To quote from Mr. Bevan's admirable work, *Christianity*:

'They almost always attack Christianity as they have found it represented by some poorly-educated clergyman in the next street, or some dull traditionalist who taught them at school. This is quite in accordance with the precept of good Sir Thomas Browne, who advises us that "to confirm and establish our opinions, 'tis best to argue with judgements below our own, that the frequent spoils and Victories over their reasons may settle in ourselves an esteem and confirmed Opinion of our own." By attacking Christianity in its most ignorant exponents, or even grossly caricaturing it after their own fancy, as a preparation for overthrowing it, they are able to arrive at the little chirrup of felt intellectual superiority far more easily than if they had to address themselves to a system of thought set forth by a competent and able contemporary thinker.'

There is truth in Mr. Bevan's charge; and it is with shame that I admit that in the past I have been far from guiltless. I hasten

to make such amends as I can by now invoking Mr. Lewis, for I do not think that anybody would wish to question Mr. Lewis's competence as an exponent of Christian doctrine. If they do question it, I am sorry, but I cannot help myself. After all, when one has a proposition, or set of propositions, to discuss one must take *somebody's* statement as the basis of discussion. Unfortunately, as the critic of Christianity quickly finds to his cost, whatever statement he *does* take is certain to be assailed by objections from some quarter on the score that it is not an accurate representation of Christian doctrine. Even quotations from the Bible, or the Book of Common Prayer are not, it turns out, above suspicion. How is he to avoid this difficulty? Since with the best will in the world he cannot avoid it completely, he must make do with the best contemporary statement he can get. In favour of Mr. Lewis's, it may be urged that it is well and clearly written, that it is scholarly in presentation, that it embodies the results of much recent scholarship and that it avoids extreme views and keeps well to the middle of the central path of Christianity. It is also orthodox in respect of its acceptance of the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith; it is the work of a manifestly able man and it has achieved a very considerable reputation. I make no apology, then, for citing it frequently in evidence.

Mr. Lewis's statement of the Christian claim, which occurs in a passage dealing with the doctrine of Hell, is as follows:

'In the long run,' he writes, 'the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of hell, is itself a question; "What are you asking God to do?" To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary.'

The operative words here are 'But He has done so, on Calvary.' In other words, when Christ died to save mankind by washing away man's sins, He gave all men that were then living, or were to live thereafter, a new moral start. This new moral start is an advantage with which all those who have been born since Christ lived and died, begin their lives. If they take advantage of it, they are better placed both in regard to their moral prospect in this world and in regard to their prospects of salvation in the next, than all their predecessors. 'It is necessary to everlasting

salvation,' says the Athanasian Creed, 'that he also believe rightly the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ'. The presumption is that those who do not believe in it cannot be saved; that is to say, will not live in eternal bliss. The half-pitying, half-patronizing attitude of many Christian apologists to Socrates, Plato, Confucius, Lao Tse, and others who lack this advantage of believing the Incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet did obviously manage to attain a certain not discreditable level of goodness and wisdom, shows that this claim has usually been taken seriously. Christians would not go so far, I think, as to say that the case of those who have had no chance to accept Christ is worse than that of those who came after Him, had the chance, and failed to take advantage of it; but, so far as one can deduce from their writings, it cannot be much better. The relation of those human beings who came after to those who preceded, may be likened to the relation of a bridge call which has been doubled to a bridge call which has not. If the caller who has been doubled brings it off, the rewards are greater, but so, if he fails, are the penalties. In other words, the stakes have been raised. Similarly, we are required to believe that the moral stakes have been raised for all mankind since Christ died upon the Cross. Such I take to be the essence of the doctrine of Atonement.

### THE CHRISTIAN CLAIM. (2) THE CLAIM IN RESPECT OF MAN'S PLACE IN THE UNIVERSE

The second claim is that man, precisely because he has a soul to be saved, is a being unique in the world, a point of reference to which all other living creatures must be referred. They and the rest of the universe are not ends in themselves, they are only means to the end which is man. Not only is man conceived as the centre of the natural world, the natural world is conceived as being there only, as it were, in order to put man in its centre. These conclusions seem at first sight rather startling. Here are some quotations from Mr. Lewis in support of them. He is discussing the question how far the animals may be said to have personalities or souls. He remarks that

'The error we must avoid is that of considering them in them-

selves . . . The beasts are to be understood only in their relation to man and, through man, to God.'

Hence the animal who has no relation to man is described as an unnatural animal:

'The tame animal' (that is to say, the animal who serves man) 'is in the deepest sense the only "natural" animal—the only one we see occupying the place it was made to occupy.' For are we not expressly told in the Bible,

'Man was appointed by God to have dominion over the beasts?'

Coming more particularly to the question of the nature of selfhood or personality in animals, Mr. Lewis advances the view that they only attain real selves in us. He points out that there are several senses in which the word 'in' may be used. According to one of them man is 'in' Christ, according to another, Christ is 'in' God; in yet another, the animals are 'in' man, at least 'those beasts that attain a real self are *in* their masters.' The suggestion is that the beasts attain selfhood only as members of a larger whole which Mr. Lewis calls 'The goodman-and-the-goodwife-ruling-their-children-and-their-beasts-in-the-good-homestead'. This larger whole is a 'body' in the Pauline sense of the word 'body', and, as parts of this 'body', the animals not only attain selfhood and realize their full natural condition, but even achieve a kind of immortality, that, namely, which is realized 'in the immortality of their masters'.

The claim is, then, that men alone have personalities or selves; that the animals achieve a kind of temporary dependent self only in relation to man, their master, but that this self resides only in the relation. As Mr. Lewis puts it, 'The dog will know its master and in knowing him will be itself'.

#### *Scope and Purpose of the Ensuing Discussion.*

I do not, of course, wish to suggest that the two aspects of Christianity to which I have referred constitute the whole or even, it may be, the most important aspects of the Christian claim. They are, however, I venture to think, *distinctive* of Christianity; Christianity, that is to say, is the only religion for which the birth and death of Christ are central events in the history of the universe, and the only religion which regards the

animal creation as existing for man and realizing its nature only through him. Hence these two aspects of Christian doctrine offer themselves as pre-eminently suitable for discussion in a chapter which is concerned to assess the distinctive claim of Christianity, as compared with and opposed to all other religions, to be the repository of divinely revealed religious truth.

There is a more personal reason for this selection. It is clearly impossible in a single chapter appended at the end of a book, even to begin to discuss the whole of the Christian claim. One can attempt at most an impressionistic sketch of one's own attitude. The difficulty is to bring that attitude to a focal point. It is here that Mr. Hollis's challenge is opportune; opportune because it constitutes a focal point for discussion. I am asked why, accepting so much, I do not accept the whole of the Christian claim; I appear, Mr. Hollis complains, uninterested in the Christian claim. Reflecting upon this challenge and asking myself why I do not, I find that of all the numerous and impressive claims of Christianity it is precisely these two, the claim to the uniqueness of the personality of Christ and the events connected with His birth and death, and the claim to the uniqueness of man, that chiefly stand in the way of my personal acceptance. (And here let me again make the point that in this respect I believe myself to be typical of many of my generation.) Hence it is appropriate that these two claims should be discussed, since whatever else there may be of importance in Christianity, this at least is true, that upon their acceptance or rejection it must stand or fall as a religion making a *distinctive* and *exclusive* claim to truth.

Both claims seem to me to be indictable on the ground of lack of perspective. One is anthropomorphic in the sense that it gives an undue importance to man; the other parochial, in the sense that it gives an undue importance to that slice of history which immediately precedes and includes our own times. Enlarge the perspective, as science and philosophy demand that it should be enlarged, and the human and the topical lose the distinctive importance which Christianity would attribute to them. As it is the easier to discuss, I take the second and less important claim first.

## (1) THE CLAIM TO MAN'S DISTINCTIVE POSITION IN THE UNIVERSE

This claim, as I have said, seems to me to be indictable on the ground of gross anthropomorphism. I do not wish to suggest that man may not be unique; I do not even wish to deny that his uniqueness may consist in his possession of a soul, or a self, or a continuing consciousness. These claims, it seems to me, may quite possibly be true. What I think cannot be true is that the animals are here only for man's benefit, that they achieve selfhood only in him and that, so far from being ends in themselves, they are means only to the realization of the end which is man. If they *are* only means, we can only suppose that God was not able to create man, except he first created the animals; that in other words, the only road to man for God lay *via* the animals. It may be so; but, if it is so, God is not omnipotent. If, on the other hand, they are *not* merely means to our ends, then the question of the suffering of the animals before man's arrival on the scene assumes a very different significance, becomes, in fact, a real and irremediable defect in the cosmic plan. I do not think that the issue is one which can be decided by arguments; the question involved is in the last resort one of plausibility.

Here are some considerations which seem to me to render the claim exceedingly unpalatable.

(a) It is estimated that there has been life of some kind upon this planet for about 1,200 million years, human life for about a million. During the vast period before man appeared, the animals had no relations with man. Therefore, according to the view we are asked by Mr. Lewis to accept, they were means to ends which did not exist; also they were all unnatural in the sense that no animal during that period realized its true nature. That God should have created animals to suffer is bad enough; that, granted the Christian view of pain as due to man's misuse of his gift of freewill, the animals before man *should* have suffered is, as I have already pointed out, unreasonable enough. But that so many millions of creatures should have been created to be the instruments of an as yet non-existent being, means to an unrealizable because as yet non-existent end, that they should

have been created without ever having the chance of becoming completely themselves—these things, I find frankly unbelievable. On the view of animal nature here put forward, the existence of creatures during this vast period, would seem to have been a pointless waste. I do not believe that a good God does things pointlessly, or that He is wilfully wasteful.

(b) Many creatures now living do not know man. This is true of almost all fish, almost all insects, and almost all bacteria. (In passing, it seems worth while mentioning that the fact that these are not mammals does not seem to afford any ground for excluding them from the scope of Mr. Lewis's argument.) Are we, then, to say that their natures are, therefore, unrealized, that they are unsuitable instruments of the purpose for which they were created, that they are unused because unusable means to the only end which justifies their existence? If so, their creation would seem once again to be a pointless waste.

(c) The main difference between a tame rabbit and a wild one is that one is kept alive in order to nourish man, the other is not. The former is quite literally a means to man's survival; the latter is not. The former, therefore, conforms to Mr. Lewis's specification; the latter does not. Are we, then, to say that only the tame rabbit is really a rabbit, that only the tame rabbit fulfils the purpose for which rabbits were created? I can see absolutely no reason for such an assumption.

(d) Some creatures, (A), prey upon other creatures, (B); they are parasites upon their hosts. Some creatures, (C), keep other creatures, (D), in order that the (D)s may minister to them, fertilize them, digest for them, feeding, or otherwise enabling them to live. Are not the (A)s entitled to say that the (B)s exist as instruments of *their* purposes, as means to their ends, necessities of their existence? Would not the (C)s be entitled to say that the (D)s only realized their natures and fulfilled the purposes for which they, the (D)s, were kept alive, when they did in fact perform their function of ministering to the (C)s? Yes, they would, if the (A)s and the (C)s were as respectively A-morphic and C-morphic in their interpretation of their biological universes as Mr. Lewis is anthropomorphic in his interpretation of his. And they would be very surprised to be told that the (B)s and the (D)s were there, not, as they had supposed, for their purposes,

but for those of a creature of whom neither they, the (B)s, nor the (D)s, had ever heard.

(e) Nineteenth-century divines, anticipating, though more crudely, Mr. Lewis, preached sermons explaining that God gave rabbits white behinds in order that, when they ran away, they might make easier targets for human marksmen. God, therefore, they deduced, made the universe for man and put the animals into it to assist man to live. When, on a hot summer day, a man excretes the waste products of his body, a swarm of insects may be seen to settle on the steaming excrement. Might they not, if they reason as Mr. Lewis does, declare that God created the world for insects and put man into it for the purpose of providing them with sustenance? Is not, indeed, the most suitable comment on the whole of this line of thought to be found in Xenophanes's famous remark: 'Even so, lions and horses and oxen, if they had hands wherewith to grave images, would fashion gods after their own shapes and make them bodies like to their own'? It is, I think, the parochialism of this claim which makes it chiefly unacceptable to the modern consciousness. Knowing how large the universe is, how many its forms of life, can we really believe that it is all done for us? That they are all *there* for us?

(f) I cannot forbear to mention a curious corollary of Mr. Lewis's claim, though it would be out of place to dwell on it. Not only, it appears, are the beasts here for the sake of man, not merely do they realize their natures only in his service; they realize their natures by serving him only in a particular way and in a particular state of society, not, necessarily, it would seem, by affording him food or sport, but by constituting an integral part of the larger whole, 'the goodman-and-the-good-wife-ruling-their-children-and-their-beasts-in-the-good-home-stead.' This is parochialism *in excelsis*; it is not merely the facts that most beasts lived before man and, therefore, on this view, have no selves; that many men whom the beasts have served in the prescribed relationship, have not been good men, and that, therefore, the serving beasts, through no fault of their own, have no selves—it is not, I say, all these and many other considerations of the same type which render this view in the highest degree unplausible; more disconcerting than any of them is



the fact that the goodman-in-the-good-homestead conception belongs to the past of civilization, is palpably dying in the present, and will probably disappear in the future, and is related, therefore, to a particular and temporary form of organization of human society—not, be it noted, to that form of organization which characterizes the society in which Mr. Lewis happens to live, but to a form of organization which characterized a more primitive form of society which Mr. Lewis happens to like, and for which, apparently, he is imbued by a feeling of nostalgia. When machine production has largely supplanted the good-homestead, when, as a result, men and women are served by machines and not by beasts—what then? The beasts no longer being integrated into the required relationship will presumably lose selfhood. As they cease to serve man, their existence will become as pointless as it was before man appeared upon the scene. Horses, perhaps, and even dogs may in such circumstances disappear. But lice and tape-worms, and others of man's faithful attendants, will *they* accompany the horses and dogs into non-being? It scarcely seems likely. God, then, on Mr. Lewis's view, will have to be credited with the pointless production of innumerable creatures who have no place in the cosmic scheme—for the function of animals, it will be remembered, is to serve man and only tame animals realize their full animal nature—long after they have any function left to perform, and long after they have any chance of realizing their animal natures. Yet God, we are told, does nothing in vain. . . .

## (2) THE CLAIM IN RESPECT OF CHRIST'S UNIQUE STATUS IN THE UNIVERSE

The second claim is that Christ is unique among human beings, precisely because He is not wholly a human being, but partly a God, being in fact God's Son; that no other human being who has lived upon the earth has enjoyed the privileged position of being both divine and human; that Christ was sent into the world at a particular point of time for a divine purpose, namely to atone for and redeem man's sins in the past and to facilitate his salvation in the future; that Christ's coming was, therefore, a unique event, the most important in the history

of the planet; that nothing that has happened after it can be quite the same as it would have been if the event had not occurred, or have the same significance as anything that happened before, and that the Christian religion, which asserts these propositions about Christ and teaches his doctrines as ultimate, revealed truth, is the only true religion. The following is a statement of the claim from Mr. Bevan's book:

'Christianity has also taken over from Judaism the belief that God does definite things in the world-process, chooses persons and peoples for definite purposes, guides the whole process to an end already adumbrated in the Divine Community. Its distinctive belief is that God in the Person of a Man entered Himself into the suffering of humanity, and planted within humanity, in the Divine Community, the seed of a new supernatural life. God, so conceived, is transcendent, above the world, but not aloof, not indifferent to the world.'

Mr. Bevan seeks to throw the content of this statement into relief by describing a doctrine, the doctrine of Unitarianism, which denies the claim, and which, by reason of its denial, forms no true part of Christianity. Unitarianism he describes as throwing off 'all traditional Christian belief about a descent and self-humiliation of God, in the coming and the dying of Jesus Christ, and holding up simply the human figure of Jesus or the "values" enunciated by Jesus, extracted from the Gospel record, as sufficient basis for a religion by which for all time men could go on calling themselves Christians'.

According to Mr. Bevan's statement of the Unitarian creed, 'the significance of Jesus is stated by saying that he by his personality "revealed God"—"God is like Jesus". No Christian,' says Mr. Bevan, 'would question that this is an important truth about Jesus; it is insisted upon in the New Testament—"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father". But when it is given as the most sufficient brief statement of what the Divinity of Jesus means, what his principal work was, it conceals a grave ambiguity. For every good man in his measure reveals God: indeed there is no creature which does not in some sense show what God is like. A mirror reveals an object without being the object. A great action, on the other hand, reveals the character of the agent by being itself the agent in operation.' According

to the Christian faith, Jesus revealed God in the latter sense, not in the way a mirror reveals: in Jesus God did His supreme act of love for men.'

The considerations which seem to me to weigh in the scales against this claim fall into five categories:

(a) *Topographical and Temporal Parochialism.*

The claim seems to me to be topographically parochial; it seems, that is to say, unlikely that the particular set of events associated with Christ's life should be so uniquely important in space, as the claim asserts. Space is very large, Palestine is comparatively small. Why am I expected to believe that what happened in Palestine is of such unique importance? The answer would seem to be, that it is because I happen to live spatially to the west of Palestine, and belong, therefore, to a civilization-culture which derives its religion from Palestine. If I had lived equally near to Palestine, but to the east of it instead of to the west, if, in other words, I had been born in a bedroom in Delhi and not in a bedroom in Durham, no such expectation would have been entertained in regard to me. I should not, that is to say, have been expected to take, and should not in fact have taken, this view of the uniqueness in space of Palestine, and in Palestine of Bethlehem. In truth, the claim that we are considering is logically of the same family of claims as those which assert that my family, my school, my house at my school, my university, my college at my university, my club, my country, my county in my country, or my village in my county, is better than anybody else's because I happen to belong to it. That we all do commonly make such claims is, of course, true; and there is no harm in them if they are taken as expressions of a simple loyalty. But they cannot, I suggest, sustain critical examination, if they are put forward as constituting reasons for believing in the objective superiority or intrinsic importance of that to which I happen to belong. Whether we are in general indulgent to or contemptuous of such claims depends upon our natures and our outlook. If we are given to partisanship, we shall vigorously maintain them. If, on the other hand, we try to see humanity as a whole and take pride in emancipating ourselves, so far as we may, from the trammels of the accidental and the local, we shall

regard them as proper to an immature rather than to a mature human being. In this connection it is worth noting that it is Christianity itself that holds, and rightly, that all men are in a very real sense brothers and, therefore, of equal importance in the eyes of God. It is, therefore, as it seems to me, wholly in accordance with the spirit of Christianity that we should refrain from accepting as uniquely and exclusively true the tenets of a religion which is embraced by reason of a topographical accident of birth, and regarding certain events as unique merely because that religion, and that religion alone, so regards them.

The temporal pretensions of the claim seem to me to be more remarkable even than the spatial. Let us again consider the significance of the figures of the time-scale of life. There has been life upon this planet for something like 1,200 million years, human life (giving all doubtful candidates to the title of humanity the benefit of the doubt) for about a million, human civilization (again being generous to doubtful specimens of civilization) for about 3,000. We can estimate that the period during which conditions favourable to life will obtain upon this planet is likely, short of accident, to be in the neighbourhood of some 1,200,000 million years, that is to say, about a thousand times as long as the whole past history of life. We also know that one day the heat of the sun will no longer be sufficient to maintain the conditions in which alone life as we know it can exist. When that time comes, life will either have disappeared altogether, or will have migrated from this planet, or will perhaps have emancipated itself from the necessity to incarnate itself in matter, and will continue, therefore, to exist without existing anywhere.

Upon the vast extent of the prologue to Christ's appearance I have already commented by implication on an earlier page.<sup>1</sup> Nor do I find it a bar to belief. A divine event of unique importance may well require and be entitled to such prodigious preparation. Moreover, time for deity may well be quite other than it is for us. Let us grant, then, that the appearance of Christ two thousand years ago, nearly a million years after man's first appearance, and nearly a thousand after he had first achieved civilization, is an event whose importance in the perspective of an evolutionary time scale is intelligible.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 46, 47.

the Creed will be saved; those who do not will be damned. Now Plato lived before Christian doctrine was promulgated; Plato had not heard of the Catholic Faith, and Plato did not believe the Articles of the Athanasian Creed. Therefore Plato was damned. It is just as simple as that.

Conversely it seems to follow that if you have lived after Christ and if you have heard about Him—this proviso is, I imagine, necessary since most human beings who have lived after Him have not heard about Him—and if you have taken such steps as, in the circumstances, you could be expected to take, to inform yourself of His message, then (a) you possess better information about the nature of the universe and greater insight into the nature of man and his place in the universe than it would have been possible for you to have had before, and (b) you have a better chance of entering into eternal life than you had before. The second of these claims does not mean that you will continue to live indefinitely, whereas those who preceded Christ or, while succeeding Him, had nevertheless not heard of Him, would not continue to live indefinitely, since all men are immortal; but it *does* mean that your eternal life will be passed in a more desirable state or place or set of circumstances—in heaven perhaps, and not in hell or in purgatory or in limbo—than would the eternal life of anybody who *had* lived before Christ.

Now in its application to Socrates, Plato, Lao Tse, Confucius, Buddha, Aristotle, to mention a few names, where dozens could be given, I find this claim totally incredible and (in case I have not stated it correctly, for one is always liable to be tripped up by Christian apologists who say that, for their part, *they* would have put the claim differently, and that it is only one's outrageous ignorance of Christian doctrine that could possibly have induced one so to have misapprehended and misstated it) let me say that I find any claim which approximates to it to be incredible.

I think that I sometimes know a good man when I see him. I am pretty sure that I know a wise man when I read him, and nothing will convince me that Socrates and Plato, to mention two men with whose works I happen to have some acquaintance, did not possess a deeper insight into the nature of man and his destiny in the universe, than many—indeed, I would venture to

say most—of those who have professed the Christian faith. As to the exclusive claim to salvation, the claim that believing Christians will pass their eternal life in more desirable circumstances, at a higher moral level, and with greater spiritual enlightenment than these men, I do not see how it can be either proved or disproved. I content myself with the remark that a universe in which such a claim was true would seem to me to be a non-moral universe, and the God who prescribed the law which made the claim true, an unjust God.

It may, of course, be said that the Athanasian creed no longer represents Christian views. If it does not, it is to say the least of it, odd that it should be printed in the English book of Common Prayer, and religiously chanted in many churches at some of the Sunday services. In my boyhood it was chanted once a month on Sunday morning and I can well remember how I used to dread the Sundays at which the lengthy Athanasian was substituted for the shorter Nicene creed. Now, either the statements which the creed contains are believed, or they are not. If they are not believed, why are they printed as part of the accredited formulation of Christian doctrine used in Anglican churches? If they are not believed, why are they repeated? If, to come to the real point, the Athanasian creed no longer forms part of the Christian faith, why are we not told so?

Let us examine one more exclusive Christian doctrine.

*The Christian Doctrine of Hell, Ancient and Modern.*

The question here at issue is, I suspect, again not one for argument; it is a question rather of perspective. We are considering the Christian claim that the teaching of Christianity is wholly and distinctively true in a sense in which the teaching of no other religion is true; that Christianity is, in fact, the one true faith.

But though the claim is universal, its content is parochial. It includes the parochial doctrine of heaven in which, though eternity is timeless, human beings are pictured as doing things in time. It includes the even more parochial doctrine of hell which has poisoned the lives of countless little children—I can remember how my own childhood was made miserable by the prospect of the torments, etched in with what loving particularity by the

sermons of Mr. Spurgeon, that awaited me—and overshadows the closing years of many adults.

It is the habit of modern Christian apologists to explain away the physical aspects of hell in spite of the most explicit statements of Christ on the subject, and to interpret them in a metaphorical sense. If I take one such example from Mr. Lewis, I do so less because of its intrinsic importance, though it is typical of much Christian apologetics, than because it serves to throw into high relief this question of perspective. Mr. Lewis is careful to point out that Christ speaks of hell under three aspects, those of punishment, destruction, and exclusion. Mr. Lewis stresses the meaning of the second and third of these aspects. Nothing, he points out, is ever wholly destroyed; thus, if you burn a log, you are left with gas and ashes. Similarly no human soul is ever wholly destroyed; there remains something which is *that* which the soul *was*. But this something is less than the soul; is less, therefore, than human. This state of being shut-out from or deprived of humanity is, Mr. Lewis holds, the meaning of the notion of exclusion; this state of being less than a soul the meaning of the notion of destruction. Hence the reality of hell consists in the state of having less than 'soul-hood', of being deprived of one's humanity. 'What is cast (or casts itself) into hell is not a man; it is 'remains'".

There is, it seems to me, an obvious difficulty here. Either the 'lost soul' remembers its previous condition of soul-hood and is aware of the condition of humanity from which it is now excluded; or it does not remember and is not aware. If it remembers and is aware, if, that is to say, it still has memory and an understanding consciousness, it must be still a soul. If it does not remember, and is not aware, then what is there about its condition that can be a source of grief to it? But if it is unable to suffer grief because it does not know what it has lost, it is difficult to understand in what sense it can be said to be punished.

Mr. Lewis proceeds to discuss the question, whether the punishment is eternal.<sup>1</sup> It may be, he holds, that this existence which belongs to 'something less than a soul' endures only for a time; ultimately the quasi-soul may fade away into nonentity. There

<sup>1</sup> This question is referred to again on p. 336, below.

are many, he notes, who think the doctrine of hell severe on the ground that only a harsh God would make souls that are sinful, or allow them to become sinful and then condemn them to eternal punishment for being what they are. Mr. Lewis rebukes them; for what, he demands, in the passage from which I have already quoted, 'are you asking God to do? To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.'

I have three comments. First, the whole doctrine seems to me to be in the highest degree unplausible. I cannot imagine that an educated Greek, Chinaman or Hindu would tolerate it for a moment. Christians are under the necessity of making the best of it only because of the embarrassingly unequivocal utterances of the Scriptures, but nobody who was not bound by this necessity would think it worthy of serious attention. Secondly, it involves the, to me, totally incredible and repellent view that those who lived before Christ and have not, therefore, been given the 'fresh start' are in worse case than those who lived at the same time, or who have lived after; that they were more sinful, their sins not having been forgiven them; more unenlightened, the divinity of Christ not having been revealed to them; and more hopeless, the prospect of salvation not having been held out to them. The application of this conclusion to Plato, Socrates, Aristotle, not to mention the great sages of the East, leaves one amazed at the impertinence of its parochialism.

Thirdly, the fact that Mr. Lewis has dwelt upon the notions of exclusion and destruction and said little about the notion of punishment should not blind us to the fact that other Christians have said very much. Mr. Lewis's doctrine may be modern in respect of his refusal to dwell upon the more repulsive aspects of the doctrine of hell, but it is certainly not representative of the doctrine which most Christians who have lived have taught and believed. For a more representative teaching on hell I would refer the reader to the sermon preached by the Rector in James Joyce's book *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which the various pains of hell are described with minute and loving particularity,



(i) as afflicting each of the five senses simultaneously,  
 (ii) as, nevertheless, not cancelling one another or even, through combination, losing their separate and particular effects, and

(iii) as continuing at maximum intensity throughout eternity. It is only the literary skill and imaginative vividness with which Joyce has invested the Rector's description that distinguish it from the accounts with which thousands of priests have literally 'put the fear of God' into millions of human beings. It is the concept of gross and eternally extended physical agony, not the concepts of exclusion and destruction, that has throughout the ages been the backbone of Christian teaching on the subject of hell. I find it impossible to resist the temptation of asking Mr. Lewis why I as a layman should accept his decent though difficult version as correct Christian teaching, and reject the predominant and continuing version as being incorrect Christian teaching. The twentieth century has no monopoly of truth in Christian exegesis, any more than it has in other spheres of human thought. Of course it may be said that the old teaching on the subject of hell is mistaken. If so, then we should be told that it is mistaken. It may be said that it should be interpreted symbolically; few, I understand, now really believe that Christians are punished eternally by physical torment in hell. 'It may here be noted,' says Mr. Bevan in his book, *Christianity*, 'that modern views of the fate of those who die unsaved reinterpret or repudiate either the adjective or the substantive in the phrase "eternal punishment"'. Some, that is to say, teach that the punishment involves real pain, but that it is not for ever, others that the punishment is really for ever, but that it is not torment as pictured in the old view.' If these are the things that most Christians believe, then surely we ought to be told so, and this appalling doctrine of hell should be taken out of the contemporary statement of the Christian creed. Yet—and I must be forgiven for returning to the point—as one reads the writings of the Fathers and the records of the Church, it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that most Christians who have ever lived have in fact believed in the doctrine, and difficult not to believe that Jesus Himself believed in it; witness, for example, his warning that we should fear God, who 'is able to destroy both soul and body in

hell'. For my part, I find the doctrine as originally stated, incredible and repellent and I do not find the various attempts made by modern writers to explain away the traditional statements of the doctrine satisfactory.

(c) *The Personality of Christ.*

Is this after all so unique in its excellence as to support the tremendous claim which Christians make for the Founder of their religion? Like many others who were brought up in the Church, broke bounds as an adolescent and escaped into a world of cheerful agnosticism, I have always been enormously impressed by the personality of Jesus. Discarding the Church and its ritual, I yet retained an immense respect for its Founder. Jesus might not be the Son of God, but He was a man of the profoundest wisdom, teaching doctrines of the greatest moment. It was, indeed, because of its persistent refusal to attend to these doctrines, that Western civilization was, I believed, in its present predicament. By 'its present predicament' I meant the manifest instability and injustice of capitalist civilization—I am still summarizing a pre-War mood—and it was, I suppose, the socialist elements in Jesus's teaching that chiefly evoked my admiration and respect. It was largely because of its failure to take the obviously revolutionary aspects of Jesus's teaching seriously that I condemned the Church. 'For God's sake don't touch the Church of England!' said a House of Commons wit at the time of the celebrated debate on the revised Prayer Book, 'it is the only thing that stands between us and Christianity.' The jibe admirably expressed the attitude of the Left-wing agnostics of whom I am taking myself as a fairly typical representative.

Moreover, I was a pacifist who believed that war was the ultimate evil, that of all the great religious teachers Christ had most powerfully and convincingly denounced it, and that it was its manifest and persistent refusal to pay attention to any of the more embarrassing tenets—for example, those relating to non-resistance—of the creed it was supposed to profess, that had brought Western civilization to its present pass. Wishing to reinforce my conviction of the explicitness of Christ's teaching on the subject of non-resistance and to estimate its applicability to our present situation, I turned at the beginning of the war to

refresh my memory of the figure whom I had so long revered, and sat down in a quiet week to read the Synoptic gospels. What sort of impression, I wanted to know, did the person and teaching of Jesus make upon a twentieth-century mind which, deliberately eviscerated for the occasion of historical associations and carefully stripped of theological prepossessions, offered itself open and bare to the impact?

*The Gospel Narrative.*

The effect was so different from what I had expected that I am still trying to piece together the fragments of my shattered preconceptions. First, as to the story. I had for so long taken for granted the beauty of the gospel narrative that the reality came as something of a shock. I was not prepared for the almost complete absence of form. The three Synoptic gospels, composed, as they are, of strings of detached sayings and incidents, struck me as naively episodic. Jesus does this, says that, comes here, goes there; but there is no more reason for the sayings and the doings than there is continuity about the comings and the goings. The narrative, in fact, often reads like a school-boy's holiday diary of the 'We went on to the beach; then we bathed; then we had lunch. Mr. X came to lunch; Mr. X said . . .' type.

The fragmentary character of the narrative bears hardly upon the exposition of doctrine. Important matters are raised, discussed for a few verses, and then dropped, sometimes to be raised again in a later chapter. Jesus is for the most part preaching to simple people; yet His utterances are cryptic to a degree. Many I found frankly meaningless. I was also worried by the many inconsistencies; for example, at the Last Supper Jesus bids His disciples buy swords, yet He tells them not to trust to the sword, and, when one of them uses it and cuts off a soldier's ear, Jesus rebukes him and heals the ear. He makes supplication for Peter 'that thy faith fail not', yet a couple of verses farther on tells him that his faith shall fail to the extent of denying Him thrice. He tells His hearers to 'make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness', yet four verses later tells them that they cannot serve both God and mammon. He frequently dilates upon the eternal torment that awaits sinners, yet says that God will forgive all those who sin.

He makes assertions that have been shown to be untrue; for example, that the end of the world will occur before the contemporary generation has passed away, and that many alive will see Him coming again 'in a cloud with Power and great glory'. He implies that those who believe in Him will not starve—God feeds the ravens; how much more valuable are men, at any rate believing men, than ravens? The implication is inescapable and Jesus, refusing to escape it, bids His followers take no thought for food and clothing. But millions of faithful Christians have in fact starved.

### *The Character of Jesus.*

But it is the character of Jesus Himself that I found most disconcerting. I was astonished at the lack of warrant for the 'gentle Jesus, meek and mild' conception in which I had been nurtured. The figure who appears in the gospels is a stern and very often an angry man; witness His scourging of the shopkeepers for carrying on their business in the Temple precincts. He is touchily sensitive and liable to break out into torrents of denunciation on what seems to me very inadequate provocation. Thus when people ask Him for a sign which will demonstrate that He is what He claims to be, He calls them a generation of vipers. This is unjust. There is surely no merit in believing without evidence; why, then, these bitter reproaches when evidence is asked for?

Christ's denunciation of unbelievers, His dislike of being asked for evidence, His touchiness under criticism, His habit of equating with sin an inability to assent to what must have seemed highly dubious propositions, are taken over and developed with interest by His followers. How harshly, for example, Saint Paul speaks of those who do not accept at first blush every curious word He utters. Any stick is for him good enough to beat an unbeliever with—'One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, idle gluttons. This testimony is true.'—and all this because the Cretans were 'gainsayers', that is to say, they refused, when exhorted by Paul to do so, immediately to desert their old religion for a new one. That Christians have at all times been arrogantly intolerant in their attitude to those who refused to share their beliefs is common knowledge; nor is the discovery of such intolerance in Paul particularly shocking.

But, having been taught to believe that there was a deep fount of gentleness and kindness in Christ, and looking, therefore, to Him for a no less compassionate understanding of men's intellectual failings than He bestowed upon their wine-bibbing, their gluttony, and their sexual irregularity, I was dismayed by the spate of bitter denunciation which the least hint of intellectual disagreement brings down upon the heads of the disagreeers. Hating the sin, Christ, so we have been given to understand, was, nevertheless, merciful to the sinner. And yet with what violence does He assail those who proffer a demand for His credentials. Surely, in the circumstances, a very reasonable demand! There have been many in the history of mankind who have conceived themselves to be divinely inspired.<sup>1</sup> How, then, it may be asked, is a man to distinguish the true from the false, the genuine from the impostor, if he is not to be allowed to ask for evidence? If a man were to arise among us to-day and claim to be the repository of God's word, still more if, like Christ, he insisted that he was God's son, we should regard ourselves as foolish if we accepted the claim without substantial evidence in its support.

It may, of course, be said that the evidence was internal; it was there for those who had eyes to see, in the personality of Jesus. But Jesus did not feel this Himself, else why the passionate anxiety to be recognized which He so frequently displays throughout the narrative, the many promises of rewards to those who accept Him at His own valuation, the direful punishments threatened against those who do not? One is disconcerted by the frequent resort to threats. For example, if we do not go in proper fear of Jesus's God, we are warned of His ability and, apparently willingness, 'to destroy both soul and body in hell'. The warning seems, to say the least of it, unnecessary. Who would not fear God if he really believed Him to have such power, and such intentions in regard of its use? This bribing of men into belief—'confess me before men', and I will confess you 'before the angels of God'—this blackmailing of the recalcitrant by threats—if you deny Me, I shall deny you. . . And then? Then, apparently, thou burn in hell; the references to eternal torment are found peculiarly disconcerting.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 7, pp. 272, 273, for an account of the claim of Mr. Muggleton.

Recognize Me, or it will be the worse for you, is not the sort of thing that one expects from the founder of the religion of love. But, though Jesus continually preaches the virtues of loving, I can find little evidence that He practised them. He shows affection for two or three of the Disciples and for small children, and He is kind to erring women, but, broadly speaking, that is all. The point has been well made by Mr. Claude Montefiore, who observes how rarely Jesus lived up to His own doctrines. 'What', he writes, 'one would have wished to find in the life story of Jesus would be one single incident in which Jesus actually performed a loving deed to one of His Rabbinic antagonists or enemies. That would have been worth all the *injunctions* of the Sermon on the Mount about the love of enemies put together.' He is exceedingly harsh to His mother and, much to my astonishment, actually bids His followers *hate*<sup>1</sup> their fathers, mothers, wives, children and brothers (Luke xiv, 26). He is unreasonable, blasting a fig tree for not bearing fruit out of season, and ruthless in His disregard of life and property, as when He causes the death of a herd of swine by drowning.

### *Anti-Intellectual Bias.*

But it is the anti-intellectual bias of Jesus that I personally found most disquieting. He abuses men of learning, denounces the critical attitude in order to throw into favourable relief that of unquestioning acceptance, and tells people that it is only if they become as little children, and, therefore, as innocent and, presumably, as ignorant as little children, that they can hope to understand Him and be saved. The science of the time, that of the Greeks and the Romans, is denounced as 'science falsely so-called', while human knowledge is dismissed with the plain—'And if any man thinketh he knoweth anything, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.' This attitude has served as a cue for Jesus's followers, a cue which St. Paul was all too ready

<sup>1</sup> Of course it *may* be the case, and many will no doubt affirm that it is the case, that the word 'hate' does not mean hate, but does mean something else. . . . Possibly, possibly not. But I am concerned here with the effect of Christianity upon the simple and unlettered, who are not sophisticated enough to know that sometimes words do not mean what they say.

to take—'The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.' 'For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.' These sayings are typical of Saint Paul's attitude. Of course, it may be said that the 'wise' were very far from being wise and the 'science falsely so-called' is not science at all, but is Gnosticism, that is to say, something very different from what we should be prepared to regard either as science or as wisdom. Possibly, possibly not. I am not a good enough Biblical scholar to offer an opinion on this issue. This, however, the layman may permit himself to say; as one reads Paul's writings, even as one reads the Gospels, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that much the same hostility would have been aroused by and felt for the science of our own times. When we consider the attitude of the Church to independent learning throughout the ages, the endeavours of the mediaeval Church to suppress free scientific enquiry, the hostility of the nineteenth-century Church to the great discoveries of contemporary biologists, it is difficult to avoid the view that these are expressions of the same attitude of mind as that which Paul brings to the denunciation of the Gnostics.

So far as Jesus Himself is concerned, we search His sayings in vain for any statement on art, music, science or philosophy, while problems of sexual relationship, of politics and economics are to all intents and purposes ignored. It may be said that these things are unimportant in One whose business it was to make men conscious of their souls, to convict them of the sense of sin, and to bring them to God. It may be so. Yet one wonders whether, if Christ had been a little more intellectual, His utterances would have been quite so obscure. It is all very well to tell people that they should be as innocent as little children, but what little child can understand the parable of the Unjust Steward? It is all very well to decry men of intelligence, but how, unless you *are* intelligent, are you to understand 'Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven . . . neither in this world nor in the world to come'? And what is the meaning of 'He that hath ears to hear let him hear'? It cannot be *merely* a tautology, equivalent to He that understands, let him understand. It must mean more than that. What more? Possibly, that if you have faith, you will understand; if not, not. But why should you have faith in what you

do not understand? And why should not Christ, if He really ~~knew what He meant~~, have been at pains to make Himself clear, so that others might know too?

It will, of course, be objected that these are just the sort of unsympathetic questions that an unbeliever would ask. But why should the unbeliever be sympathetic? Of course, if one believes, if one has faith, the questions would not present themselves, or, if they presented themselves, one would be content to let them remain unanswered, believing that the answers would be one day vouchsafed to me. But why, as I have already asked, *should* one believe unless one's reason is first convinced? And is not Christ's teaching after all addressed at least in part to the reason?

*Digression on the Authenticity of the Gospel Narrative.*

I am afraid lest the foregoing may raise up for me a host of critics. In particular I shall be reproached<sup>1</sup> for my naïve assumption that the Gospel record is accurate, and that the figure that emerges is veridical. Have I no knowledge, I have been asked, of the wealth of scholarship that has been lavished on the investigation of the sources and the assessment of the authenticity of the Gospel narratives? I have some slight acquaintance with these matters. I know, for example, that with regard to most of the passages to which I have taken exception it is 1

(1) That they do not mean what they say, but are to be interpreted symbolically, or (2) That they are later interpolations, and that the most obnoxious of them are not to be found either in Mark or in Q, Q being the presumed source of that which is common to Matthew and Luke, but not to Mark.

Again, I have read enough to be convinced of the accuracy of Mr. Bevan's summary that 'in the case of our earliest Gospel what we have is only what Saint Mark recollected of what Saint Peter recollected of what Jesus had said some thirty-eight years before Peter's death, and that translated from Aramaic into Greek', and, therefore, to be sensible of the pertinence of his warning 'that it is absurd, apart from the Church's judgement, to press every clause or every sentence in the words attributed to Jesus, as if they had been taken down at the time by a phonograph or by shorthand'.

<sup>1</sup> I have, indeed, been reproached by those who have been good enough to read this chapter in manuscript.



Nevertheless, it is possible to assent to the justice of this warning, and yet to confess to a certain disquietude at the high-handedness of those critics who, whenever Christ says anything which seems to be more than usually at variance with modern modes of thought, dismiss it on the ground either that He didn't say it, or that it means something quite different from what it seems to mean. In regard to such matters as, for example, that of the 'two swords', of 'the fig tree', and of the 'herd of swine', to which I have ventured to make unfavourable reference, it has been represented that, since they make nonsense to modern ears, Christ can't have said them, or that, if He did, they mean the opposite of what they seem to mean. There are even critics who go to the length of asserting in respect of some phrases that a positive meaning should be turned into a negative one by the insertion of the word 'not', or of the syllable 'un'. Thus, we are told that the explanation of the curious reference to 'the mammon of unrighteousness'<sup>1</sup> may be that what Christ in fact referred to was the 'mammon of righteousness', but that, since an early copyist found Christ's sentiment in its bearing upon the 'mammon of righteousness' incredible, he inserted the equivalent of the syllable 'un' in order to make sense of it.

I cannot here enter into these and other minutiae of criticism. Their effect is to show that the Gospel narratives are not first hand recording, and may, therefore, be misleading. In fact, they probably are often misleading. But what then? What else is there? When one is trying to form a judgement as to the authenticity of the Christian claim that Jesus Christ was a divine personage, the Son of God, where is one to turn for material upon which a judgement can be based, except to the one record that we have of the sayings and doings of the person whose status is in question? The fact that the record is faulty is unfortunate. But, I repeat, what else is there?

In answer to this question various suggestions are advanced. It is suggested, for example, that it is to the whole body of early Christian writing, including more particularly the Epistles of Saint Paul that we are to look for our relevant material. You do wrong, I am told, when painting your picture of the figure of Christ, to confine yourself to the story of the Synoptic Gospels.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 318.

There is other evidence less direct, but scarcely less important. Consider, for instance, the implications of the fact that the Synoptic Gospels appeared in a world which doctrinally had already reached the position indicated in the Epistles of Saint Paul; and that the figure which appears in the Synoptic Gospels must, therefore, be compatible with, nay more, must fit into a frame already fixed by Paul's own doctrine. It is a mistake, then, to treat the figure, the parables, and the sayings of Christ as they appear in the Synoptic Gospels in isolation, as if we had no other information in regard to them. The evidence available for exploration is, in fact, a composite picture put together by different hands, using different materials, and written at different times? To put the point in the words of friendly critic, 'when we are constructing our portrait of Christ from the Synoptists, we have first to check it by recalling that the figure is that of someone who gave rise within a few years to Pauline theology; then we have to add to that the further fact that John's Gospel appeared in a world that was perfectly familiar with the Synoptists and with Paul.'

This leads to a more general charge. It is, I am told, 'a mistake to leave scholarship out', and to bring to a consideration of the record of Christ's sojourn and teaching upon earth an open, because an empty, mind. It is necessary, I am admonished, to acquaint and equip oneself with the conclusions of some of the best work that has been done by Christian commentators and philosophers—by, for example, Bishop Gore's *Reconstruction and Belief* or his *The Philosophy of the Good Life*, Bevan's *Hellenism and Christianity*, Inge's *Philosophy of Plotinus*, Temple's *Nature, Man and God*—before one permits oneself to write on these matters.

There are two heads to this charge. As regards the first, I have deliberately refrained from referring to Pauline theology because the personality of Christ that it suggests seems to me less attractive, the teaching which it implies, and to which it refers, less enlightened than the personality and the teaching of the Synoptic Gospels. I find Pauline theology distasteful and forbidding. To include it and all that it stands for, to take into account the implications in regard to Christ's nature and teaching that it suggests, would be for me to make the task of coming to terms with Christ not less formidable, but more.

Similarly the figure in the Gospel of Saint John is, for me, not more sympathetic but less, the teachings not clearer but more obscure.

As to the scholarship point, if I were to read all the eminent authorities who have written on Christian doctrine, I should find it very difficult not to see Christianity through the spectacles which they had prepared and tinted for me. Is it wrong, I wonder, to try to make up one's mind for oneself? An educated man, I have been thought fit to form my own opinions on politics, in regard to the education of my children, or the investing of my capital, provided that the relevant evidence on which an opinion should be based is put before me. Why, I wonder, is it wrong for me to try to form it for myself in regard to the validity of the Christian claim on the evidence of the Gospels, having recourse to modern authorities only when I feel the need of them?

Resuming the attempt to answer the question posed above—what other material is there beside the record of the sayings and doings of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels, upon which a judgement as to the authenticity of the Christian claim could be based?—I propose to have recourse now to Mr. Bevan's book, *Christianity*. 'There is', says Mr. Bevan, who is concerned to propound an answer to precisely this question, 'the judgement of the Church.' There is also, what he calls the 'belief in the value of Christian tradition'. This, he says in effect, is what Christians have believed throughout so many centuries. Now it would be unreasonable to attach *no* weight to this continuing tradition of belief. The inference is that the doctrine of the peculiar divinity of Christ deserves respect, and also apparently acquires weight, precisely because so many good men have believed in it. Or what other interpretation are we to place upon Mr. Bevan's reference to 'the authority which a belief derives from the fact that it has actually been a belief underlying the specifically Christian life throughout the centuries, apart from its statement in a text of scripture'? I am unable to regard this as a very cogent consideration. We cannot, after all, conclude from the fact that human beings have believed something over a long period that the belief is therefore true, or even that it gains thereby in probability. To do so, would be tantamount

to accepting the suggestion that the judgement of mankind is infallible. And what of the beliefs of other and rival religions? For my part, I should even doubt if the fact of continuing belief can be accepted as contributory evidence in favour of the truth of what is believed, the fact of the matter being that men have believed too many things which are known to have been false to entitle us to base any conclusion upon the mere circumstance of the continuing and traditional character of a set of beliefs.

Again it is sometimes suggested that Christian teaching is not so much the sum as the germ of Christianity, that is to say, the origin of a growing body of doctrine ever interpreted and re-interpreted anew and amplified by the Church, and that the interpretations and re-interpretations and amplifications are as deserving of respect as the original doctrine. This view is bound up with, indeed it would seem to depend upon, the assumption that with the creation of the Christian Church, what Mr. Bevan calls 'a supernatural life entered humanity'. It follows from this that the judgements and decisions of the Church on questions of doctrine and belief as, for example, which books of the Scriptures are divinely inspired, and, therefore, infallible, and which are not, or what is the correct Christian attitude to problems which have arisen since Christ's life upon earth, are entitled to claim the same authority as the pronouncements of Christ Himself. On this assumption Christian doctrine will ultimately be extended to cover the whole field of those human interests of which only a comparatively small corner was tilled by Christ Himself. As Mr. Bevan puts it, 'according to the belief of the Church, the whole compass of human interests is to be brought into harmony by the operation, throughout the ages, of a Spirit who is the Spirit of Jesus himself in His community, a community potentially co-extensive with man'. Regarded as an argument, this seems to me to beg the question at issue. If Christ is divine, then some share of His divinity may well be supposed to have descended upon the Church which He founded, and to invest with a peculiar authority whatever pronouncements the Church may have made. But if He is not, the tradition of the Church is robbed of supernatural authority, and cannot, therefore, be invoked to substantiate a belief in Christ's divinity by virtue of the fact that it extends or completes His teaching.

*The Poverty of Christ's Teaching on Social and Economic Issues.*

This brings me back to the question of the poverty of Christ's teaching in regard to economic and social questions, and of His apparent indifference to the higher activities of the spirit of man in philosophy and science and art, a poverty and an indifference which, unless the Church's tradition does indeed own supernatural authority, cannot be eked out or made good by recourse to the Church for supplementation and amplification.

Leaving aside the question of the authority of the Church's teaching, we may pertinently ask, 'What, prior to the last hundred years, in the way of supplementation and amplification has been forthcoming?' Through the greater part of the Christian centuries the omissions in Christ's teaching in regard to these matters have been rather repeated than rectified by the Church.

Taking their cue from Christ, earnest Christians have been all too often indifferent to or contemptuous of the processes of artistic creation and scientific thought, have discouraged curiosity and disparaged the activities of the original and enquiring mind. Immersed in the business of saving souls for the next world, they have belittled or ignored men's sufferings in this, and with notable and praiseworthy exceptions, have persistently refused to concern themselves with political or economic measures for the prevention or alleviation of palpable ills. They have further followed Christ in giving way to righteous indignation on what seems to be very inadequate provocation, equating disagreement with sin, and holding that if a man took a different view from themselves in regard to propositions whose truth was doubtful or unknown, it was legitimate to compel his agree-  
y the infliction of gross physical agony. To none has it been so clear as to Christian priests that a man's opinions could be improved by roasting.

*(d) The Effects of Christianity.*

This last consideration introduces the general question of the effects of Christianity. It is important that the matter here at issue should be clearly defined. Christianity claims to be a

unique revelation of the will of God and the laws of conduct. It also claims that Christ's birth was a unique event which so changed the moral face of the world that everything that succeeded it must be judged by reference to a different moral standard from anything that preceded it.

Now it may with justice be said that, whether Christianity succeeds in winning mankind to do God's will and observe His law, depends not upon God but upon man. Man has free will; therefore, he is free either to reject Christian teaching or to accept it. He is free, again, while accepting Christian teaching, through negligence or sinfulness to ignore it in practice; free, through misunderstanding, to pervert the teaching he accepts. For none of these rejections, misunderstandings, negligences or perversions can Christianity, it may be said, be blamed. They are due not to the observance but to the neglect of Christianity, a neglect arising from the hardness of men's hearts or the thickness of men's heads.

All this is true. Nevertheless one is entitled to look for *some* beneficial effects from such a unique revelation. The world, one feels, ought to be a little better, and better by the standard of the Christian virtues, than it was before Christianity appeared on the scene.

Is it better?

There are three sets of considerations which seem to me to be relevant to the answering of this question.

(1) *Effects of Christ's Teaching on Men's Behaviour.*

First, there are general considerations. We can point to the impact of Christianity upon the people of Europe some two thousand years ago, take note of the more or less unintermittent contact between human beings and Christian teaching throughout the whole of the succeeding two thousand years, and then ask ourselves what has been the result? For two thousand years, from a hundred thousand pulpits, in a million sermons—it is a formidable reflection—men have been told that they ought to be kindly and gentle, that they ought to return evil not with a contrary evil, but with good, that they ought to set their thoughts not on earthly, but on heavenly things, that they ought not, therefore, to value riches, that they ought to think of their

neighbours more than of themselves, and of God more than either. What, then, has been the result?

First, as to individuals: can it be said after two thousand years of this process of moral exhortation, that an average individual taken at random from among the passers-by in the street of a London suburb is morally either a better or a worse man than an average individual taken at random from among the crowds of fifth-century Athens? I find it difficult to believe that he is. There have, of course, been great Christian individuals, whom, it may be, only Christianity could have produced; there has been, for example, Saint Francis, there has been Father Damien. But these men are not average, but outstanding Christians. Men no less great and good have, I suspect, been produced within the folds of other religions. Aristides and Pericles were pagan Greeks!

Secondly, as to communities of individuals; can it be said that the policies and practices of States in the twentieth century A.D. are morally better than their policies and practices in the fifth century B.C.? For my part, I find that they are very similar, being prompted by the same emotions of greed and fear, inspired by the same ambitions to aggress and to dominate, guided by the same desires to rule subject peoples, to humiliate conquered enemies, and to exploit property-less classes. Can it, one wonders, be seriously maintained that the spectacle of contemporary Europe in which men and women are everywhere bending their energies to perfecting themselves in the art of slaughtering other human beings whom they have never seen, thereby directly or indirectly flouting every tenet of the creed they are supposed to profess, is a good advertisement of the effects of two thousand years of Christian teaching?

## (2) *Christian Behaviour Compared with Non-Christian.*

We can, in the second place, take a general survey of the behaviour of Christian peoples in the past with a view to considering whether it is noticeably better than the behaviour of those who have not enjoyed their advantages. Christians have been cruel; more killing, starving, imprisoning and torturing has been done in the name of Christ, who bade His followers love one another, than in the name of any other creed or cause.

Christians have been intolerant as much as, perhaps more than, the followers of any other creed; they have regarded disagreement as morally blameworthy and sought to improve the minds of those who took different views from their own by inflicting pain upon their bodies.

Owing to the deplorable vagueness of Christ's teaching on political and economic matters, Christian apologists have found little difficulty in justifying capitalism, imperialism, money-grubbing, slave holding, fighting, imprisoning, burning and torturing, by an appeal to His words. Even where Christ's teaching has been disconcertingly precise, as on the subject of non-resistance to violence and the ownership of wealth, they have found little difficulty in ignoring it or perverting its plain meaning, so that His recommendation to turn the other cheek when attacked, has become the Christian duty to stick a bayonet into another man's body, while His injunction not to lay up treasures for oneself upon earth has been interpreted through the Christian centuries as an encouragement to unremitting attention to business with such unvarying fidelity that Samuel Butler's jibe, 'It is all very well for mischievous writers to maintain that we cannot serve God and Mammon. Granted that it is not easy, but nothing that is worth doing ever is easy', is an almost exact description of the practical ambitions of most good Christians.

In all this it may be said, human nature is only showing the stuff of which it is made. No doubt. It is perhaps too much to  
Christianity should change human nature, or  
all, modify human behaviour; but one might, one  
feels, be justified in expecting that some of the less agreeable  
aspects of human nature should have been softened; some of  
the more agreeable thrown into high relief. Unfortunately,  
however, it is a moot point whether the behaviour of Christians  
to one another has been on the whole better or worse than the  
behaviour of non-Christians to one another.

(3) *Reference to Particular Aspects of Christian Behaviour. (i) Persecution.*

In the third place, reference can be made to particular aspects of Christian behaviour. I select two for notice out of the many that present themselves. First, there is persecution. History suggests that, whenever a class, a party, a king, a dictator,



or an idol becomes the focus of human aspiration and the object of human worship, the emotions of anger, hatred and righteous indignation tend to be directed upon a different class, a contrary party, a rival king, an opposing dictator, or an alternative idol. It suggests further that when God comes to fill one of these rôles for a people, when, that is to say, He comes to be thought of as God militant, then these emotions are directed upon rival gods or rival worshippers of the same God. From the days of the Old Testament onwards the Christian God has been frequently represented in one or other of these rôles. He has been the commander of the army of the faithful rather than the loving Father of us all, with the result that Christianity has been a proselytizing and a persecuting religion, seeking to increase the number of the faithful by conversion, and to diminish the number of the unfaithful by extermination, if conversion was refused. The course of Christianity has accordingly been disgraced by atrocities which stain the annals of no other great religion. It may be doubted whether the records of human history contain anything more horrible than the extermination of the Albigenses, the proceedings of the Inquisition in Spain and the Netherlands, and the Thirty Years' War in Germany. All these things were done in the name of Christianity; they were sacrifices on the altar of a faith which invoked penalties on disbelievers so horrible that its followers conceived themselves justified in inflicting any atrocity in order to avert from their victims the results of disbelief. Of disbelief, or of other-belief, since it must be remembered that the most bitter of Christian hatreds were aroused, the most violent of Christian actions taken against rival interpreters of the teaching, meaning and intentions of Christ and of the Fathers.

Few points of difference have been the cause of so much suffering to human beings as those arising in regard to matters which one would have thought comparatively indifferent, as whether bread and wine are bread and wine or body and blood, or whether the Holy Ghost was descended from the Father and the Son or from the Father only. Again it may be said that Christianity cannot be held responsible for the excesses of Christians. I answer that Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, have been disgraced by no similar excesses; they do not proselytize

and they do not persecute, and their adherents, even when convinced of the truth of their beliefs, do not seem to be under the necessity which Christians have felt of making the world uncomfortable for those who do not share them.

What, in the light of these effects of its adoption, are we to make of the claim that the revelation of God's word, which is embodied in the teaching of Christianity, tells us more about the nature of the universe and the moral law than the revelation contained in any other religion.

(ii) *Reaction.*

The second aspect of Christian behaviour that I propose to cite has a more local significance. What, over the last two centuries, has been the record of the English Church in regard to the enlightenment of the mind, or the amelioration of the lives of the inhabitants of this country? Has it on the whole assisted or obstructed those movements and causes which have sought to increase the one or to promote the other? The reader who takes the trouble to acquaint himself with the history of the English Church during the last 150 years cannot help but notice how often claims for justice, appeals to reason, movements for equality, proposals to relieve the poverty, to mitigate the savagery, or to enlighten the ignorance of the masses have encountered the opposition of the Church. From many similar instances I cite a few at random. The clergy of the Established Church either actively opposed or were completely indifferent to the abolition of the slave trade. Even the pious Churchman Wilberforce, writing in 1832, was compelled to admit that 'the Church clergy have been shamefully lukewarm in the cause of slavery abolition'. They opposed the movement for the abolition of the Rotten Boroughs, prophesying that, if the Reform Bill of 1832 was carried, it would lead to the destruction of the Establishment. They opposed in 1806 Whitbread's Bill to establish parish schools in England out of the rates, the Archbishop complaining that the proposal would take too much power from the clergy. State education was indeed persistently opposed by the Church, because, as an eminent cleric said, 'it would enable the labouring classes to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books, and publications against Christianity'.

In the 'thirties and 'forties the Church clergy of all sections denounced the Chartists with as much vigour as their successors seventy years later were to denounce strikers and Socialists, while the Tractarians preached against all those who 'taught the people to rail against their social superiors'. In the 'seventies Joseph Arch found the rural clergy, with some few exceptions, actively hostile to his movement to procure a living wage for the half-starved agricultural labourers.

### *The Defence.*

Again it may be said that creeds must not be judged by their exponents. In this particular case it might be added that the fact that the Anglican Church is a State Church has been in large part responsible for its opposition to whatever was thought to threaten the position or militate against the security of the moneyed and landed classes that dominated the State. In fairness, too, it must be added that I have deliberately stressed the shadows in a picture, which, like every human picture, has both light and shade . . . I have not looked at the other side of the record. What is printed on it? That during the Dark Ages the Christian Church was the sole guardian of the remnants of Graeco-Roman culture; that throughout those dreary centuries the monasteries kept the torch of civilization alight; that in the Middle Ages the Church was the patron of the Arts; that during the succeeding centuries it was responsible for most of what little education the masses received—this, and much more than this, is true, and, I imagine, is known; that it is known, I take for granted. Even the examples I have cited are, if I may mix my metaphors, double-edged. Whitbread's bill was itself the outcome of an agitation by Christian people headed by Robert Raikes of Gloucester for the teaching of poor children; the campaign for the abolition of slavery was mainly Christian in inspiration, and the principle in the name of which slavery was abolished, the principle that individuals are ends in themselves, immortal souls with a right to happiness in this world and a chance of salvation in the next, is one of the principles that we owe in a quite special and distinctive sense to Christ's teaching. But all this is not to the point. I am not after all denying that religion gives us information as to the moral law of the universe and the right conduct of

human life; I am not denying that Christ's teaching contains such information; I am denying that it contains a unique and uniquely authoritative instalment of it, unique and authoritative that is to say, in a sense in which no other religious teaching contains similar and similarly important information. And—here is the point—my denial is partly based upon the test of effects. I am contending that, if the Christian revelation were in fact unique in this sense, then it ought to have made those to whom it has been vouchsafed better and gentler, and it ought in a noticeable degree to have made its accredited teachers and exponents better and gentler. It ought, for example, to have been sufficiently potent with them to have enabled them to withstand the temptation of tying Christ's Church to the chariot wheels of the State, with the result that its interests have been identified with the maintenance of the ignorance, the exploitation and the injustice upon which States in the past have thriven.

(e) *The Doctrines of Christianity.*

To say of any doctrine that it is a doctrine held by all Christians, or that it forms an official part of Christian teaching in the sense in which a government statement is an official exposition of the policy of the government, is an extremely hazardous undertaking. Thus the doctrines of the Athanasian Creed are, I suppose,<sup>1</sup> part of the officially professed doctrine of most Christians. But I do not think the orthodox Church of Russia professes them; I doubt whether many of those Catholics or Protestants who profess them believe them, and I doubt whether many of those who believe them understand them. A similar difficulty attaches to most accredited Christian doctrines. It is difficult, that is to say, to be sure either that most Christians do in fact believe them, or that all Christians who have at any time lived have been required to believe them. In spite of this difficulty, I propose briefly to refer to certain doctrines which have in fact been held by many Christians, which have always seemed to me to be particularly hard of acceptance. At the head of these is the doctrine of hell, but of this I have already written<sup>1</sup> and beyond saying that I am convinced that it was intended and has usually

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 311-313.

been interpreted in a literal sense, and that in a literal sense I find it unbelievable, I shall not refer to it again.

### *Predestination.*

It is, however, closely connected with the doctrine of predestination. Many Christians have held that a man's destiny, whether for salvation or damnation, is predestined from the first; that God knew what this predestined fate would be, and that it was in this knowledge that He created the individual so predestined. Now a large number of human beings do and are predestined to do evil; for this they are predestined to be damned, that is to say, to be eternally punished by a punishment which is both of the mind and the body, inflicted by a Being who is infinitely powerful. God, therefore, must be supposed wittingly to have created vast numbers of people to do evil which they could not have avoided doing, and to suffer eternal agony which they could not have avoided suffering. Nevertheless, God is good and loving.

I am aware that the doctrine of predestination is not held in this form by most Christians to-day. Nevertheless, it has certainly been maintained by vast numbers of Christians in the past, and, as I have tried to show,<sup>1</sup> it derives considerable logical force from the doctrine of God's omniscience. For, as I have pointed out, if God knows everything, He knows everything that is going to happen, and, since He cannot err, everything that He knows to be going to happen must in fact happen. This seems to be inconsistent with the doctrine of human free will. Indeed, the conclusion of the discussion in Chapter 2 was that it was logically impossible to reconcile the doctrine of God's omniscience, if taken in a strict and literal sense, with the doctrine of human free will.

Now Calvinists and many Puritans, in insisting upon the fact of predestination, seem to me to have taken, and taken very naturally, one of the two logical paths out of this *impasse*. Insisting upon God's omniscient purpose, they have implicitly denied human free will. Hence if men do evil and are damned, they have no hesitation in saying that that is because God intended them to do evil and to be damned.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 2, pp. 36, 37.

This conclusion is, I gather, too much for most modern theologians, as it is too much for me. Insisting upon human free will, they have tended to let God's omniscience, in any sense in which it would interfere with human free will, drop out of the picture. Nevertheless, being logically rooted in many pronouncements of the Founder and of the Fathers, it is always tending to creep back and to crop up in unexpected places. Consider, for example, the following argument of Mr. Lewis's on the subject of Judas's sin. Mr. Lewis is descanting on the good effects of suffering. It produces submission to God's will in the sufferer and compassion in the spectator. Even sin, he says, can be used by God to produce good. It may, for example, 'cause grace to abound'. Thus out of what Mr. Lewis calls 'simple evil' God may bring 'complex good', exploiting the evil for the purposes of redemption in those who repent. But none of this, Mr. Lewis is careful to explain, excuses the evil. The fact that good may come from sin does not mean that it is not sin, and, because sin, blameworthy. This leads on to the doctrine that in whatever way you act 'you will certainly carry out God's purpose'—how, indeed, could you do otherwise?—'but it makes a difference to you whether you serve like Judas or like John'.

In other words, Judas does what Mr. Lewis calls 'simple evil', but God utilizes the results of the evil so as to produce 'complex good' to which, presumably, Judas's sin is a means. This does not, however, excuse Judas's sin. Since, however, Judas was carrying out God's purpose, I can only conclude (i) that God's purpose was that evil should be done; (ii) that Judas could not help but do it, and that he could not help, therefore, but deserve the eternal damnation which, it is not doubted, he now suffers.

I find the implications of this doctrine impossible of acceptance. I do not believe that a good God wittingly purposes evil, and I do not believe that Judas was damned for what, as the instrument of God's supposed purpose, he could not help but do. I do not, in fact, believe that he was damned to begin with. Nevertheless, I can see how naturally from the Christian notion of the personal, interested, supervising, interfering God, sending His Son into the world to redeem mankind, and knowing in advance what the result would be, these, to me, repellent conclusions spring.

## GOD AND EVIL

### *The Fall.*

'In the developed doctrine, then'—I am again quoting Mr. Lewis—'it is claimed that Man, as God made him, was completely good and completely happy, but that he disobeyed God and became what we now see'.

Now the Fall did not, it is obvious, take place without reason. God would not have been so unjust as to punish man, if man had not sinned. Therefore man sinned before the Fall, and because of his sin incurred the Fall. Man's sin has in fact been particularized by Saint Augustine as that of pride; pride—this is Mr. Lewis's definition—is the 'movement whereby a creature (that is, an essentially dependent being whose principle of existence lies not in itself, but in another) tries to set up on its own, to exist for itself'. There is not, I think, among Christian writers any general disposition to quarrel with this account of the first sin. Throughout Christian doctrine we are warned again and again of the foundational character of the sin of self-love; again and again admonished that it is our duty to think not of ourselves but of others, to love not ourselves but God.

There are two difficulties which for me make this doctrine of the Fall impossible of acceptance. (i) Sin, as I have pointed out, is not according to this doctrine wholly the result of the Fall. One sin at least preceded it and caused the Fall. Now, if man was wholly good, he could not have sinned, since sin is a sign of imperfection. Therefore God did not make man wholly good, and the source of evil must be pushed back to a period before the Fall.

(ii) If it be answered that man first sinned in the exercise of his gift of free will, it must be pointed out that it is precisely in his free will that his glory and also God's goodness in bestowing it upon him is said to consist. God wanted him to be free, since the goodness of an automatic robot was, compared with that of a free moral being, of little worth. Yet directly man begins to exercise this gift in which his peculiar distinction consists, directly, though his 'principle of existence lies not in himself, but in another', he chooses to think or will for himself, then he is punished for so thinking and willing by the Fall and by the terrible consequences of the Fall, not only for himself, but also

for others. But of two things, one: either man is not really free at all, in which case he is not a free moral being; or his freedom consists precisely in his ability to *win free from that other* in whom his existence is rooted, and to think and will for himself.

In other words, the evil that led to the Fall lay precisely in the exercise of that free will in virtue of which man is established as a free moral being.

Hell, Predestination and the Fall are outstanding examples of Christian doctrines that I am unable to accept. There are others. There is the doctrine of the Trinity. There is nothing of it in the teaching of Jesus; nothing in Paul; nothing in Peter. It appears in the second century A.D., emanating manifestly from Alexandria, and embodies the metaphysics which were prevalent at the time when it was put together. I cannot accept the doctrines of the Athanasian Creed, partly because I cannot understand them. Yet I refuse to believe that because of my inability to 'believe them faithfully', I shall be damned. I do not for a moment think that the Disciples believed the propositions contained in the Athanasian statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. How could they, since they had never heard of it? And I refuse to believe that the Disciples are damned.

### *The Too Human Conception of God's Personality.*

Behind these inabilities of mine there lies a deeper one. I am unable to believe that God is a person in the sense of the word 'person' that the acceptance of much Christian doctrine entails. I have in a previous chapter descanted at some length<sup>1</sup> upon the question whether the reality behind the familiar world can most appropriately be considered after the model of a person. I concluded that with reservations it could. But of what sort of person? I do not know, and nobody save a mystic who has had direct experience of the person can know; and even the mystic can know only in a very partial sense. But one thing, I think I do know, and that is that He or It is not a person in that very human sense of the word which Christian doctrine postulates, the sense in which He punishes man for exercising his gift of free will, according to the doctrine of the Fall; the sense in which He incarnates Himself, or an aspect of Himself, or an emanation



from Himself in human form, according to the doctrine of the birth of Christ—how many anthropomorphically conceived Gods, I wonder, in how many religions and cults have assumed a human form and come down into the world of men?—the sense in which He permits an essence of or emanation from Himself to be consumed by and enter into the persons of the faithful, according to the Christian doctrine of the Mass—how many anthropomorphically conceived Gods in how many religions and cults are eaten by their followers? (the question, by the way, can be answered by the diligent reader of Sir James Frazer's *Golden Bough*)—the sense in which, though interested in and responsive to our needs, he, nevertheless, requires on occasion—as the Christian doctrine of prayer would have us suppose—to be reminded that rain is wanted in Rutlandshire.

When I say that I know God is not a person in any of these senses, I am, I realize, advancing too far along the road of dogmatism; what I think I *do* know is that I am unable to believe that God is a person in any of these senses, and here I think I speak for many of my generation. Why can we not believe these things?

There are, I think, three main reasons. First, anthropology has taught us too much about the past history of our race, and in particular about the past history of the beliefs of our race. We know how strong a family likeness to some Christian beliefs is exhibited by many other beliefs which are embodied in the creeds and cults of our predecessors, our anthropomorphically-minded predecessors, and we suspect them to be the parents of the closely related beliefs which appear in a Christian setting.

Secondly, science has taught us too much about the nature of the universe in general, has revealed too much of the past of life and of human life in particular, to make the distinctively historic beliefs to which I have referred seem other than relative to the circumstances of time and place in which they were engendered.<sup>1</sup>

Thirdly, our reasoning faculty is too much on the alert to be willing to vacate the seat of our understandings and yield the vacant place to faith. For, it is only to faith that the doctrines I

<sup>1</sup> The kind of relativity here suggested does not, of course, affect the validity of ethical beliefs as such, or, I think, such religious beliefs as are common to all the great religions. These, I have already argued in Chapter 6, *can* be objective.

have named are acceptable, and in the light of the considerations here mentioned, the faith that accepts them seems to us to be blind.

*The Dilemma of Reason and Faith.*

This brings me to the most difficult of the questions that this analysis raised. Many of the doctrines I have mentioned are indifferent, if not actually repugnant to reason. Hence, it is by faith and not by reason that they are embraced. It is, indeed, evident to me that many men of better intelligence than myself have been and still are able to accept what is to my reason unacceptable, precisely because it is not to their reasons that they put the question, 'Is this acceptable or not?' I have so phrased the preceding sentence that it has a derogatory implication. It is not meant to be derogatory. These men do not put the question to reason because they do put it to faith, and faith, assuring them that it is acceptable, assures them also that whether it is acceptable to reason or not is a matter of comparatively little moment. It is only faith that has this power to put reason temporarily to sleep, nor do I wish to deny that, given faith, such an exercise of its power is legitimate. *Credo, in fact, quia incredibile*; incredible, that is to say, to reason but not to faith, and because credible to faith, exempt from the need to be credible to reason.

I do not doubt that it is on these lines that men of better intelligence than myself, if they were to seek to justify their beliefs would explain their acceptance of, for example, the miracle of the Mass.

While they are partaking of the Host, it would not occur to them to doubt that this was the body of Jesus Christ simply because doubt is the offspring of reasoning, and it would not occur to them that the matter was one to be reasoned about one way or the other. For we reason only when we are in doubt and wish to resolve the doubt; there is no point in reasoning when you know. But—and here is the difficulty which confronts me time and again—what is your position if you have not already faith? Surely in this event your reason must first be convinced. Granted that your reason is convinced on some important matters, then because your conviction has given you faith, you will be prepared to take others on trust, even though you do not understand them.

'Ah, but', it may be said, 'you must seek assistance in prayer, for prayer will strengthen your faith.' No doubt it will, but will it create faith where no faith yet exists? No, I think it will not, since we are told, as it seems to me plausibly, that for our prayers to be efficacious, we must first believe. Indeed, unless we believe we cannot pray in the right way, or with the right spirit. Here, then, is the vicious circle by which the intellectual would-be-believer-but-nevertheless-unwilling-unbeliever finds himself enclosed. Unless he prays he cannot confirm his faith; yet unless he first has faith, his prayer will be without virtue. And this vicious circle is itself enclosed within the bounds of a more embracing difficulty, the difficulty occasioned by the dilemma between reason and faith. If a man has faith, he can accept, though his reason is uncomprehending, or unconvinced; but unless his reason is convinced, he will not have faith; or—lest after all 'convinced' be too strong a word—if not convinced, at least persuaded that, when called to the bar of reason and judged by the test of experience, some part of what he is asked to believe is at least plausible.

*Summary of the Conclusions of the Chapter.*

Now, from this point of view, the point of view of what, to one who lacks faith, seems reasonable it seems to me to be reasonable for the reasons given in Chapters 4-7 to hold that there is a spiritual world, that this world is in some sense a personality, is, in fact, or at least contains; God, but not reasonable to hold that Christ is a divine person in a sense in which no other man was divine, and not reasonable, therefore, to hold that He is God's son. Hence, still appealing to the standard of what is reasonable, it appears to me to be reasonable to try to believe in God, in spite of the difficulties contained in Chapters 2 and 3 to which at present I see no answer, taking the solution of these difficulties as it were on faith, but not reasonable to try to believe in the *distinctive* doctrines of the Christian religion which have been examined in this chapter, not reasonable, that is to say, so far as these distinctive doctrines of Christianity are concerned, to accept on faith what is repugnant to reason. Since the word 'faith' has been introduced, let me, then, say that I am prepared to take on faith the existence and the goodness of God

—I have faith, that is to say, that some part of reality may well be identical with personality—but not to take on faith the specifically Christian claim. ‘There is no argument’, says Mr. Bevan in his book, *Christianity*, ‘which can compel anyone to make the leap of faith’. Agreed! But argument may serve to prepare the way, making the leap beyond reason to faith seem, either justifiable, or not justifiable. Such a leap does seem to me to be reasonable in the one case but not in the other. Finally, if it be put to me that the typical activity of the religious life is prayer; that when a man in doubt prays for the enlightening of his doubts, then, if he prays earnestly and sincerely, new experiences will as the result of his prayers be vouchsafed to him, or old experiences will appear in a new light, a light which will make clear to him what was previously dark, either resolving his doubt or placing it in a perspective in which it no longer interferes with his convictions as a religious man; that with a faith strengthened by the new experience or, it may be, by the newly perceived significance of the old, he will be equipped to bring a livelier hope and a new assurance to his prayers, thereby laying up for himself a fund of still richer experiences, a store of yet clearer knowledge; that he who essays the religious life thus sets up a virtuous circle in which faith brings efficacy to prayer and prayer brings the experiences which strengthen faith; that the seeker after God will be content at every stage of his progress to make the best and the most of what has been revealed to him at that stage, admitting that more, much more, could be added in the way both of experience and of conviction, but taking that ‘more’ on trust from the witness of the lives and the strength of the convictions of men who are recognizably better and more certain than himself—if, I say, all this is put to me, I am prepared to answer that, though I have little or no personal experience of such matters, the progress described would seem to me plausible and reasonable. Indeed, I am prepared to believe that it happens; prepared also to make an effort to see whether it may not happen to me. But the fact that it did happen—if it did—while it would suggest the existence of a personal and a responding, perhaps even of a loving God, would not testify to the validity of the distinctive claim which Christians have made in regard to Him and His intentions.

## EPILOGUE: SOME DISCLAIMERS

And now I see that, as usual, I have overstated my case, and that in common fairness I am committed to a number of disclaimers. The making of these disclaimers will help me to gather the threads of the preceding discussions into a single skein, and to bring out what I take to be the main conclusions of this book.

### (1) *Disclaimer in regard to the Personality of Christ.*

I do not want to suggest that Christ was not a very good man, perhaps the best man who ever lived. I am suggesting only that He *was* a man—and not more than a man—in precisely the same sense in which Confucius, Lao Tse, Buddha, Socrates and Saint Francis were men—and not more than men. And if somebody wishes to assert that all these were in fact more than men, I should be disposed to agree, provided that the word 'more' is interpreted in a very special sense.

### *The Religious Teacher as Seer.*

There are, it is obvious, a number of senses in which this word could be interpreted. It could, for example, be interpreted in a mystical sense, in terms of the conception of mysticism given in Chapter 7. All these men, we might say, were gifted with an abnormally keen vision into the nature of reality. In the light of this vision they realized more clearly, they knew more surely than others the true nature of the universe, the personality of God, and the status and destiny of man. They also discerned the nature of the moral law, knowing what was truly good and truly just. In the light of this knowledge, they lived lives which were morally superior to those of most men, exercising the power of their free wills to do what was right, to resist evil, to purify their desires and to assist their fellow men. By virtue of the lives they lived, their vision was still further sharpened and purified. Thus there was set going in them a virtuous circle, as keenness of insight illuminated the path of right living, and right living in its turn

made insight keener.' What was outstanding and distinctive in the lives and characters of these men *could*, I say, be interpreted on these lines. Yet I feel that such an interpretation places the emphasis wrongly. The description I have given is the description of one who is a mystic and also a good man, but the men to whom I have referred were teachers rather than contemplatives, and their contribution to the moral progress of mankind lay as much in action as in vision. I do not mean, of course, that they did not contemplate, did not have vision, did not, in religious phraseology, know God; I mean rather that, in the language of Plato's famous simile, they chose to spend most of their time in the cave instructing and exhorting their fellow prisoners, even though they may have possessed the power to lift themselves out of the cave.

*The Religious Teacher and the Evolutionary 'Sport'.*

This last reflection suggests the conception of the chosen vessel, the man deliberately sent into the world to give conscious expression to life's instinctive purpose. It is a conception which tallies with a well accredited formula for the genius. According to this formula the genius is represented as one in whom life has developed at a higher level than is normal in his time, a level which may be subsequently reached by the generality of the species to which the genius belongs, and in the attainment of which the next step forward of the evolutionary process consists. The analogy here is, it is obvious, with the biological 'sport', the 'sport' who breeds true, since if the genius has no spiritual progeny, if he fails to stamp the impress of his original conception of morals and politics, his original vision in art, his original inspiration in literature, upon his time, then in terms of the formula he is either not a genius at all, or a genius who fails. Nevertheless, the frequency with which spiritual 'sports' do breed true, the heterodoxies of to-day becoming the orthodoxies of to-morrow, and the man whom the fathers stoned, poisoned or crucified being posthumously ennobled or even deified by the children, shows that the process which results in the appearance of new species on the biological plane is still operative in the generation of new thought, new science and new philosophy on the intellectual, and of new morals, new art and new religion on the spiritual plane. Life, in other words, proceeds discontinuously,

and the genius like the 'sport' is the signpost pointing the direction of the evolutionary process, the pioneer who is sent forward to explore and prepare the way.

If the 'sport' does not breed true, no advance occurs; if it does, the species as a whole is presently found to be marching along the road to which the 'sport' first pointed the way. As Shelley put it, the poet 'not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germ of the flower and fruit of latest time'.

Is it, then, after this model, that the great religious teachers are to be conceived? For long I thought so. If I do not think so now, the reasons are largely bound up with the change of attitude which this book records. The mould of thinking in which the ideas expressed in the foregoing paragraphs are cast inevitably recalls the modes of thought described in Chapter 5 which, for the reasons there given, I have discarded. The genius, I wrote above, is a 'man deliberately sent into the world'. But sent by what or by whom? The answer which I used to give was 'By life', conceiving life as a creative evolutionary force and holding that the universe must be interpreted in terms of life's evolving purpose.<sup>1</sup> Is there, then, life as well as and independent of God? It seems to me now unlikely. If, as I am now inclined to believe, there is God, He must, I think, for the reasons given in Chapter 7,<sup>2</sup> be the creator of life. Therefore, the creative-evolutionary mode of thought, of which the conception of the genius just described is an illustration, seems inappropriate in a theistically-conceived universe. But why not 'sent into the world by God'? I do not know that these men were not so sent, but I think it unlikely for two reasons.

First, such sending would imply a degree of watchfulness and interference by the Almighty which savours of an unduly anthropomorphic conception of the deity. God may be a person, but is He a person in so human a sense as the sending of a succession of messengers, charged with a mission to show our species how it is going wrong, and how it may go right, would imply?

Secondly, the notion of the chosen instrument sent into the world to be the vehicle of God's message, seems to me seriously

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 5, pp. 159-161, for a development of this view.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 232-234.

to interfere with the concept of free will. The fountain pen is not responsible for what it writes, or the vehicle for the direction in which it is driven. I should not like to think that Christ and Buddha and Socrates and the rest were not purely and completely free; I believe, on the contrary, that they were free, or, to be precise, that they achieved and strengthened their freedom of will in moral conflict and by victory in conflict, and that it was precisely in this victory that their moral pre-eminence consists. I do not like to think of them as fulfilling the rôle of great teachers and moral pioneers, merely because God cast them for it.

*The Religious Teacher as a Man Informed by God.*

A more acceptable view is suggested by Hindu theology. According to this theology (see Chapter 7, pp. 253-255, above), the reality of the universe is expressed in and is continuous with ourselves, continuous not with our everyday selves, but with our true selves which underlie the stream of impulses and desires which are the raw material of the everyday self. Hence the search for reality is also the search for the true self, and in uncovering the true self, we know, or rather become one with reality. Religious discipline is, therefore, largely directed to working out and improving a technique for discovering the true self.

I do not myself subscribe to all the implications of this view; I am not satisfied with the conception of the two selves and, as I have already explained, it seems to me that reality may be more appropriately conceived under the likeness of a person than under that of a universal impersonal consciousness. It is, therefore, with the greatest diffidence that I venture to steal from a body of teaching which I cannot assimilate as a whole, one particular doctrine which seems to me to afford a plausible interpretation of the status of the great religious teacher. It is the doctrine of reality as immanent in the soul of man. This is not, I think, inconsistent with the view that reality is a person, or is like a person, for an infinite person can, I take it, be expressed in an infinite number of different individuals. Now the degree to which reality is so expressed will depend upon two variables: first, upon the fullness of the informing expression (these spatial metaphors must be pardoned; I know that they are misleading, but I do not see how to avoid them); secondly, upon the degree



of intractability in the informed material, that is to say, of the medium in which the reality is expressed.<sup>1</sup> Now the great religious teacher may be pre-eminent among men, for either or both of two reasons. Either the divine spark within him is brighter, or, it seems to burn more brightly because it is less choked by the clinker and ash of passion and desire. In Christ, in Buddha and in Socrates, it is as if the envelope which contained the divine inheritance was of a finer texture than in most of us, so that the light within shone more clearly through the fleshly covering. By virtue of the lives they lived, the texture of the envelope became thinner still and finer, so that—and here my struggling metaphors bring me home to something familiar to our modes of speech—as their characters developed and matured, the spirit burned still more brightly within and communicated its splendour to men. Thus the man in whom reality is in this special sense immanent, reveals God's goodness through the medium of his person and life, just as the artist reveals beauty through the medium of his work. The life of the saint is, indeed, like the work of the artist, a window through which the ordinary man can catch a glimpse of the nature of reality. To continue the analogy, the saint is an artist whose medium of expression is not paint or sound or clay or steel or film but conduct.

In stating this doctrine, the doctrine of degrees of God's immanence within the context of Hindu philosophy and religion, I see that I have given a misleading impression, suggesting by implication that it is not a doctrine which Christians can countenance. Such an impression would be misleading. Christianity also has room for the doctrine of degrees of immanence, as it seems at times to have room for almost any variant of theological alternatives. 'God', says Mr. Bevan in his book *Christianity*, 'so conceived, is transcendent, above the world, but not aloof, not indifferent to the world; God is present in the world, but not revealed with equal fullness and purity in a jelly-fish and in a man, in a vicious man and in a good man, in all other good men and in Jesus.' This doctrine seems to me unacceptable, in so far as it regards Christ as a unique vehicle of the Divine immanence, but it endorses the general conception here suggested that

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 3, pp. 106-108, for an account of the reasons why such a medium must be postulated.

different individuals may manifest or reveal the nature of reality in different degrees. In different, and also, in increasing degrees, for one of the advantages of this conception is that it enables us to understand how the saint may improve in respect of his power to render goodness as the artist improves in respect of his power to render beauty. But while the artist seeks by training his special faculty to master a technique, the saint seeks by training his character to improve his conduct. While the artist struggles with the intractability of his medium, the saint struggles with the intractability of his passions.

This conception of the saint as one who to begin with is far from perfect, but grows in virtue as he acquires moral worth through the training of character, gaining strength from life as he lives it, may perhaps be the key to some of those roughnesses in Christ's character to which reference was made in the last chapter. The relation between conduct and vision is stressed by all religious writers. The better a man lives, the clearer his knowledge of God; the more clearly he knows God, the better he lives. As Milton wrote, the end of learning is 'to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love Him, to imitate Him, to be like Him as we may the nearest, by possessing our souls of true virtue'.

In other words, the practice of virtue, to revert to my metaphor, thins the envelope so that the indwelling reality which is also an expression of God's person is the more clearly revealed.

Now of all such men Christ may well have been the most outstanding, not only because of the richness of his initial inheritance of the divine, but because of the fineness of the human clay in which it was enshrined, a fineness made finer still by the conduct of his life.

(2) *Disclaimer in regard to the Doctrines of Christ.*

I do not want to suggest that Christ's doctrines are not wise and true, perhaps the wisest and the truest that have yet been preached to mankind. They are, indeed, so true and so wise that they may be open to criticism on the ground that they are too good for us, men's persistent failure to live up to them having been, I suspect, more marked than their equivalent failure to live up to the teaching of any other great man, of Socrates, of

Confucius, of Lao Tse, or even of Buddha. Christ's teaching in fact may have failed because it was too far in advance, not only of his own generation, but of all the comparatively few generations that have lived in the world since He died. But that His doctrines are indeed true and wise and good may, I suggest, be deduced from three circumstances.

First, the most important of them are taught by all the other great religious teachers. I find this fact highly significant. Through all the teachings of the sages who have revealed the moral law and set a standard of conduct of mankind, there runs a highest common factor of doctrine. What is it? That 'Do as you would be done by' is a rule universally binding upon men; is in fact an article of the moral code of the universe; that God is personal and loving,<sup>1</sup> that violence is wrong, that humility is a good and pride an evil; that men should not indulge their passions overmuch; that they should not be self-centred or self-loving, but should think of others as much as or more than of themselves—in these and in similar injunctions the ethical teaching of men of widely different places and times, cultures and civilizations, is embodied; I find it difficult to believe that this circumstance is accidental. It must, I think, be due to the fact that all these teachers were in touch with, or had a vision of the same reality, or—if the foregoing suggestion as to the true status and significance of the religious teacher can be accepted—to the fact that in all of them the same reality was pre-eminently present and active. Of this common teaching Christ's is the epitome.

Secondly, there is the test of intuitive recognition. The human spirit, I suggest, yields an immediate acquiescence to the truths that Christ taught. 'Yes,' one says in effect, 'quite impracticable! Much too good for erring human beings! I couldn't possibly live up to it myself, *but* I know it is right: *that*, of course, is how it ought to be. What is more, I always knew it.' I have argued that the human spirit responds after this same manner to what is true, what is beautiful, and what is good, and that it does so respond because it has an *a priori* knowledge of these values, a

<sup>1</sup> An exception must be made in regard to the teaching of certain Eastern religions, which denies the existence of a *personal* God. The subject is discussed in Chapter 7, pp. 253-259.

knowledge which it has somehow forgotten or permitted to be overlaid.

Thirdly, there is the test of effects. There are, first, the effects upon society. I have dwelt in the last chapter upon the apparent failure of Christianity to improve the conduct of most men. But it is, I think, undeniable that there have been occasions when men's conduct has been better, occasions when it has been worse, and I would venture to suggest, that at least on some occasions when it has been better, the betterment may not have been wholly unconnected with the prevalence of Christian belief. At any rate, when it has been worse, the deterioration has often been associated with a decline of Christianity as, for example, at the present time. With the decline of Christianity something has faded out of Western civilization; a vitalizing, a humanizing, a refining and a restraining influence has been withdrawn. We may not be able to go back to Christian orthodoxy, but of something that we have come to know as the Christian spirit our world stands desperately in need. In so far as Christianity is a system of doctrines and institutions, it may well be that it has outlived its day. Considered as a system it has in practice too nearly conformed to Lenin's definition of religion as 'the opium of the people', but if by the word 'Christianity' we mean a certain quality of experience which is the source not only of the doctrines and institutions, but of all those major virtues which good men have exhibited in all ages and countries, of compassion, understanding, kindness, gentleness, unselfishness and tolerance, then certainly what we need is Christianity. In this sense, then, of the word 'Christian', what society requires is not less but more of 'Christian' effects.

### *The Nature of Clergymen.*

There are effects, secondly, upon those individuals whose business it is to teach and preach Christ's doctrines. In the last chapter I have also said some hard things about the Church. I have argued that, by and large, the professional teachers of Christianity have not in their own persons revealed to men a better way of living than has characterized the lives of most ordinary men at most times. In moments of pessimism the testimony of history seems to support such a view, but the testimony

of history must—and here is my disclaimer—now be corrected by that of experience. The human soul takes colour from that with which it habitually abides, and if the teaching of Christ is, as I believe, other-worldly in origin, the revelation, though not the exclusive revelation, of God's purpose to man, then it is not to be expected but that those who read it, love it, preach it and live with it, should not occasionally show something of its influence in their lives. How far does the conduct of clergymen, whose business it is to profess the Christian religion in this country, bear witness to such an influence?

My attitude to clergymen of the Anglican Church is ambiguous. When introduced to one, I experience a curious mixture of feelings. In the first place, there is pity, pity because the church of the clergyman is so very empty, because he habitually preaches to bare pews, or to pews filled with the very old, with the very young, with the uneducated and the stupid, and because the organization to which he belongs is so palpably on the down grade; pity, because the poor man is so rarely able to give a clear account of his beliefs; because he has been so bewildered by Darwin and Einstein and science generally; because I know that if he were to submit his beliefs to the test of dialectical discussion, any philosopher who knew his business could tie him into knots in five minutes, and drag him through the mud of intellectual ignominy. There is amusement, too, because the clergyman cuts so odd a figure in the modern world; because he must strive by such various and such curious methods to keep up with the times and bring to his Church a generation that has forgotten him, seeking by a hundred and one odd devices, by introducing into God's house the strains of jazz bands, by christening in a blaze of publicity the newly born children of international prize fighters or footballers, or by inducing the contemporary stars of the screen to preside at his dances, to sweeten the powder of unwanted religion with the jam of current entertainment; because he flounders so lamentably in the bog of apologetics for war. . . . Oh, those infelicitous remarks of Christ on the subject of non-resistance! How much simpler for everybody if He had not made them. . . . And if all this is, as I am afraid it is, to the clergyman's discredit, it is also to my own, since I have no business to be malicious, or to hit a man when

he is down. I can only plead in extenuation for these feelings and the remarks that they have inspired, that I have never wholly recovered from my reaction to the atmosphere in which I was brought up; from a childhood beset with clergymen, and with such clergymen. . . .

But presently other emotions supervene. Of these, the chief is respect. The man is, more often than not, a better man than I am. It is because I instinctively judge him by a higher standard than I apply to other men, that I am so ready to censure and to jeer when he falls below it, when his behaviour is in fact that of other men. I put it here on record that, on the whole, the clergymen I have known have been better than the average of the men I have known—not all of them, of course, and not much better. Nevertheless, taking them by and large, they have been kinder, less selfish, more compassionate and more honest. They have thought less of themselves and more of others than most of us do. Other things being equal, one would sooner go to a clergyman when in trouble or distress than one would to another man. When one lends him money, one knows that every nerve will be strained to repay the debt. Moreover he has a code to live by. He knows more often what he believes, even if he cannot explain or define his beliefs, than do other men. He knows what is right and ought to be done and he knows how he ought to try to live, even if he does not try very hard. Such knowledge is a rarity in the confusion of our times; at all times a help in the business of living, it is in times of trouble or distress a stay and a refuge. Envious man to have such a stay!

Finally—and I laugh at myself for this—I feel a sort of awe. The man is the vehicle of a wisdom which has been distilled from the experience of two thousand years; he is the *liaison* officer between this world and the next, the link between me and the universe, God's representative upon earth. Now if there really is a God, He is a very awesome person, and some part of His awesomeness descends upon His representatives. I can never wholly rob myself of the conviction that there is something sacred about a clergyman's person—unless, of course, I see him bathing. . . . And here, I see, I am laughing at clergymen in order to cover my confusion at the embarrassment which my avowal of their awesomeness has caused me. On balance, then, respect for

their calling and a somewhat grudging recognition of the merits of men who, taking them by and large, are better men than I, predominate. But why the respect, why the recognition, unless there is something respect-worthy, something to recognize?

(3) *Disclaimer in regard to the Supernatural Basis of the Christian Religion. Soliloquy in Lincoln Cathedral.*

I do not want to suggest that Christ's teaching is not the product of divine inspiration. I do not want, then, to impugn the conclusion which I have ventured to sustain throughout the second half of this book, the conclusion that religion is the response of the human spirit to a reality other than that of the world of everyday. It is not possible, I think, on any other basis to explain the effects of Christ's teaching upon the human spirit, or the peculiar quality of sublimity of the works of art, which it has inspired; for though there may be two opinions about the animate representatives of the Christian religion, about its inanimate embodiments there can be only one.

I am writing these lines in the Close of Lincoln Cathedral, surely one of the loveliest—at the moment I cannot deny myself the pleasure of saying the loveliest—we possess. I have just been shown round by the Archdeacon. I have been duly impressed by the outside and gazed in a special wonderment at the magnificence of the West front, noting the spacing of the statues, the distribution of light and shade, and the controlled freedom of the flying buttresses and flowing lines. I have been invited to observe with what meticulous detail this great place expresses and provides for every side of human nature, from the gravest to the gayest. The Gothic sculptors were affectionately curious about all the things that they loved, and their work is full of homely carvings both of familiar beasts that we all know, and of whimsical representations of extravagant beasts that only the mind of the sculptor could have conceived. The humanity of Gothic is, indeed, as Mr. Eric Newton has pointed out in his admirable *Pelican*, one of its most endearing characteristics, as it 'ranges playfully and capriciously across the whole of creation, picking out details, a monstrous form here, a charming turn of the wrist there'.

I have looked at the devils and demons whereby man has sought

to express his sense of the mischief that is in all things, and at the snails, the ducks, the foxes and the geese—the fox, by the way, is the symbol of some rival creed or some rival sect of the ‘one true’ creed, and the geese are the poor fools who listen to him—through which he showed his sense of their kinship. I have duly wondered at the multitudinous patterning of the stone and woodwork and pondered on the loving labour that went to its carving. Here, for example, over this doorway, were five hundred stone roses each of them different from its fellows; how remote the spirit from which their so carefully contrived differences sprang from any mood of ours. Here in the stone floor was a groove six inches deep, worn by the right knees of those who knelt in adoration of the pedestal upon whose top rested the casket containing the head of Saint Hugh of Lincoln. How many knees throughout how many hundreds of years were required to gouge a groove of that depth out of the solid stone? (The groove made by the left knees had disappeared beneath a big flat slab, a vandalism committed in some later period—was it by the Victorians?) I was duly delighted by the richness of the glass and exalted by the pealing of the organ. (More beautiful than the organ was the unaccompanied singing of the choir, the pure emotionless voices of the boys standing out in high relief against the rich baritones and basses of the men. I was too absorbed in the beauty of the sound to have time to wonder how such an imposing array of adult male voices could be assembled in war-time.)

I have not the descriptive powers to do justice to the wonder of this place, to the meticulous care and varied richness of the masses of the detail, and to the spaciousness of design which yet holds the vast structure together and enables the eye to apprehend the intricacies of the parts, without ceasing to be aware of the unity of the whole. I can only testify to the overwhelming impression of majesty and beauty that it conveyed. Perhaps something must be allowed for my own mood in which discontent with a civilization which, I knew, could produce no building of an even comparable impressiveness, and horror of the background of our times which enhanced both the serenity and the remoteness of the Cathedral, combined to invest the whole experience with a feeling of nostalgia for a past in which such creations were possible. How unimaginably alien seemed the



zeal and the faith of the men who had built this place! How deplorable that human beings who could rise to such heights of craftsmanship and devotion should, six hundred years later, have sunk to the bestiality of modern war! It was a wry commentary, I thought, upon the nineteenth century belief in progress. And yet the centuries of faith were, I knew, no whit less brutal. Surely man is, as Pascal insisted, at once the shame and the glory of the universe, capable of rising to heights of incredible heroism and sinking to depths of equally incredible savagery. He was capable of both then, and he is still capable of both now. But I see that I have wandered from my theme, to which I must return.

I hope I have said enough to indicate, without having the skill to communicate, the impression of beauty and majesty which this building made upon me. So glorious was it that one felt abashed in its presence, sensible to the full of one's own meanness and smallness and ugliness by contrast with the nobility of the faith and the intensity of the emotions of those who had planned and wrought it.

For what was the faith felt? By what were the emotions aroused? The subjectivist account of the religious impulse which I have summarized in an earlier chapter would answer, 'For nothing at all'. Not only, for the subjectivist, is there no God in the universe; there is nothing worshipful, nothing worthy of our reverence and awe. For the universe contains nothing of the sacred or of the sublime, what seems to us to be so is only a figment of the human imagination which we have projected upon its empty canvas. The emotions which inspired the builders of Lincoln Cathedral were only the emanations of the human mind felt for the emanations of the human mind. They were emotions, then, whose significance was misread, which were taken for what they were not; which were in fact cheats.

Now this supposition I found in the presence, and find again in the memory of Lincoln Cathedral, incredible. I remember how as an undergraduate at Oxford, in the first throes of iconoclastic revolt against the absurdity, as it seemed to me, of the faith which had been imposed upon my defenceless mind, I shocked a Workers' Educational Association's gathering of pious working people by 'debunking'—the word must be pardoned;

it so exactly expresses what I sought to do—the religious significance of the Mediaeval and Renaissance pictures of Madonnas. Was it religion, I asked, that had inspired the great works of religious art of Byzantium, of Florence, of Siena? Not at all. The Church of those days was the only patron, and the artist must paint to please the Church or starve; so he painted his mistress and fitted her into the only frame of which the Church approved, the frame of the Mother of God. The emotion enshrined in the painting was not, then, a religious emotion felt for God, but a human emotion felt for an all-too-human being.

It is possible that this explanation might serve for the Madonnas; for some of them, I do not doubt, it is the correct explanation. But for Lincoln Cathedral it will not do at all. This, I am now convinced, is an expression of man's awareness of the element of the eternal in the universe, an element which, while it is akin to, is immeasurably greater and nobler than man himself, an awareness which, though dim and faltering and clouded with earthly imagery, yet carries with it a desire to worship and an obligation to pursue the majesty whose nature it dimly foreshadows,

*Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,  
But dream of him and guess where he may be.*

Only on this supposition is the making of Lincoln Cathedral intelligible. If somebody gainsays this, I do not know how to answer him. I can say only that in respect of an attribute which forms part of the make-up of all or most human beings, the attribute by which we perceive the 'numinous' and respond to it, he is lacking, and in respect of his lack, is not fully a human being. My argument comes to rest, then, not on an argument but on a conviction. I feel, nay I *know*, that this is so, and my knowledge is characterized by an element of immediacy which is not the fruit of reasoning, though reasoning may and does support it. Indeed, it is within the framework of this knowledge that all my subsequent reasoning must take place.

## SUMMARY

The discussions of this book have covered a wide field and a brief tabulation of their main results may be useful.

(1) So far as logical argument takes us, the balance of argument seems to be strongly against the view that the universe is the creation of an omnipotent, benevolent God.

(2) Nevertheless, argument must be supplemented by data derived from other realms of experience, notably aesthetic and moral experience. These suggest that there is a level of reality other than that of the familiar world. At this level there are values.

(3) Values are absolute and independent of our minds, and aesthetic and moral judgements can, therefore, be objective. Values are also outside the evolutionary process of change and becoming, of which we, by virtue of our membership of the world of nature, form part.

(4) The claim of the mystics to make direct contact with this level of reality may be allowed. The mystics' reports vary, some asserting the existence of a universal, impersonal consciousness, others of a personal God. On balance, the evidence seems in favour of the latter, since all the objections to the latter apply also to the former, and such positive reasons as are supplied by the promptings of our emotional and passional natures point strongly to the latter. If we accept the latter, the values are probably to be regarded as aspects of God's personality, modes under which He permits Himself to be known.

(5) Granted the existence of a personal God, questions arise as to His relation to the world and the nature of His personality. The Aristotelian God, non-creative, non-interested and aloof, the object of the world's desire, who is nevertheless unaffected by the process of the world's desiring, seems to be immune from most of the objections referred to in (1). The existence of such a God affords, however, no firm foundation for the significance of moral experience.

(6) The significance of moral experience is one of the main reasons for rejecting the exclusively evolutionary universe with its perpetually emerging or successively created Gods.

(7) A full acceptance of and provision for this significance seems to be equally decisive against the Aristotelian God. Moreover, if God is a person, it seems reasonable to suppose that He has knowledge of and interest in this world.

(8) Our view of the nature of this interest must depend upon our view of the nature of God's personality, which in its turn depends upon our view of the validity of the Christian claim. The Christian claim is plausible in so far as it asserts that God exists and is interested in and concerned with our world; that He is a principle of good and is the source of the moral order in the universe and the source, therefore, of moral experience, that is to say, of our recognition of good, of our preference for good over evil, and of our abhorrence of and struggle against evil. The claim may also be accepted, in so far as it asserts that if we pray to Him, we may make contact with Him and by virtue of that contact, shall be assisted in our struggle against evil. It further seems reasonable on the evidence to suppose that He has from time to time created or caused to appear specially gifted individuals to give conscious expression to His purpose and to reveal His law, which is the moral law, to man. These specially gifted persons are the religious teachers and mystics, the repositories of original moral inspiration and spiritual vision, and of these Christ is one of the greatest, if not the greatest.

(9) The Christian claim is unplausible, in so far as it asserts that Christ is the son of God, or is in any other way, or for any other reason divine; that man was created by God in order to be loved by Him, but that through his (man's) exercise of free will he became unworthy of that love and was punished by the Fall; and that man alone of living creatures possesses a self or personality.

(10) God did not create evil; nor is evil wholly due to man's misuse of his gift of free will. The principle of evil in the universe is probably independent of God and exists in His despite. God, then, is not all-powerful. This, the dualist view of the universe, incidentally removes some of the difficulties referred to in (1).

(11) These conclusions, both positive and negative, are tentative and provisional. Nevertheless they do on balance definitely point towards the religious view of the world; they are, that is to say, on the positive side of agnosticism.

(12) It follows that I am willing, as I once was not, to bank on the religious hypothesis being true. This is not mere pragmatism, since one of my conclusions is that man's desire for and disposition to accept the religious hypothesis is, because of its universality, evidence in favour of the hypothesis.

(13) If the religious view of the universe is true; if, that is to say, the universe has a meaning and a purpose, this life is not all, and something probably survives the break up of our bodies. Indeed, unless there is a more abundant life before mankind, this world of material things in space and time is a bad joke beyond our understanding, a vulgar laugh braying across the mysteries.

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